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THE BLAME GAME: FEDERAL INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS
DURING THE CHICKAMAUGA CAMPAIGN

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
Military History

by

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ABSTRACT

THE BLAME GAME: FEDERAL INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS DURING THE CHICKAMAUGA CAMPAIGN by Major Paul A. Shelton, USMC, 144 pages.

This thesis examines intelligence operations conducted by Major General Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland during the initial phases of the Chickamauga Campaign (11 August to 16 September 1863). The thesis methodology is a detailed analysis of all intelligence reports received by the headquarters and a detailed examination of all outgoing correspondence from the headquarters intended to identify the analytical process used and the impact of intelligence on Rosecrans' decisionmaking during the campaign. The record shows that contrary to popular historical opinion there was significant intelligence available indicating the probable Confederate course of action. General Rosecrans and his staff actively discounted information that did not conform to their pre-conceived expectation or template of the enemy with tragic results for the Army of the Cumberland. This thesis highlights several timeless lessons of relevance to the modern military officer: the importance of focused intelligence collection operations, the requirement for clear thinking and disciplined analysis of intelligence reporting, the dangers of over-confidence and preconceptions, the hazard of focusing on one's plan instead of the enemy, and the importance of avoiding "group-thinking" among a staff.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We have just received official information that Vicksburg surrendered to General Grant on the 4th of July, Lee's army overthrown, Grant Victorious. You and your noble army now have a chance to give the finishing blow to the rebellion. Will you neglect the chance?¹

Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton,
The Edge of Glory

On the seventh of 7 July 1863, one hundred cannon fire a salute that echoes through the trees and hills of middle Tennessee as Major General William Starke Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland honors the victories of Federal Armies at Vicksburg and Gettysburg. After over two long years of war and repeated defeat at the hands of the Confederate Army, the tide is perceptibly turning against the Confederate States of America. On 8 July the noted Confederate diarist Mary Chesnut is aboard a train to Alabama and faints when she hears the news. "I felt as if I had been struck a hard blow on the top of my head, and my heart took one of its queer turns," she wrote.² The Army of the Cumberland had just concluded a masterful campaign that resulted in the seizure of middle Tennessee at the cost of a mere eighty-three killed. Soldiers now cite the Tullahoma Campaign as a classic masterpiece of maneuver warfare, yet no praise was forthcoming from Washington. Rosecrans duly turns to preparations to seize the key to the Confederacy--Chattanooga.

The resultant campaign for Chattanooga would see yet another stunning success when Rosecrans turned Confederate General Braxton Bragg's prepared defensive positions and dislocated his forces, entering Chattanooga bloodlessly on 9 September.

Yet eleven days later on 20 September Rosecrans would telegraph Major General Henry Halleck, General-in-Chief of Federal forces, “We have met with a serious disaster.”³

What happened? Popular history holds that Rosecrans allowed his corps to become too widely dispersed in the rugged Tennessee hills, conducted a hasty and ill-organized pursuit and fell victim to a carefully managed disinformation campaign waged by General Bragg. This thesis will consider the key question, Why did General Rosecrans fail to accurately estimate General Bragg's course of action during the Chickamauga Campaign?

This thesis will consider a number of factors that influenced Rosecrans' operations and evaluate his major actions *in their informational context*. This thesis will open with an overview of Rosecrans' experiences in the war prior to Chickamauga. The focus of this chapter will be the development of recurring themes vis-à-vis intelligence operations and synthesis, interpersonal relationships with subordinate, adjacent and superior commanders, and external pressures and motivations that may have influenced Rosecrans during the Chickamauga Campaign.

This thesis will next examine the intelligence structure of the Army of the Cumberland. The full spectrum of Civil War intelligence sources will be considered, to include cavalry scouting, signals, prisoner interrogations, refugee and citizen reports, open source or newspaper reporting, and agent operations. The staff's method of handling reports, analyzing them and producing a synthesized multisource product will be examined, as will the critical role played by “higher headquarters” reporting (or lack thereof) from Washington and information sharing between the Army of the Cumberland and adjacent armies.

Three successive chapters will be dedicated to a study of the operation itself, beginning with campaign planning and culminating with the opposing armies poised to commence pitched battle along Chickamauga Creek on 16 September. A thorough review of information reported to Rosecrans' headquarters will be conducted with a goal of determining what information the General Commanding used in formulating his plans, and perhaps more importantly, what information he chose to discount. A frequent error of historians is the failure to evaluate commander's actions using the information available to them at the time of the action--care will be taken to avoid this pitfall and add to the quality of the historic record by adherence to the concept of informational context.

This paper will conclude with a discussion of lessons learned from the campaign that are of relevance to modern commanders. There are certainly timeless aspects of Chickamauga that ring clear through the years. Many times we hear that modern commanders are subject to new pressures from the political branch of government, unnecessary and unwelcome meddling enabled by the wonders of modern telecommunications. An examination of the hounding General Rosecrans received from General Halleck, Secretary Stanton, and even the President himself shows that political pressures are nothing new. The resilience of preconceived notions and the challenge of acknowledging a mistaken perception of the enemy remain major obstacles to the accurate analysis of intelligence for intelligence professionals and commanders alike. The lessons are timeless. Mastery of the lessons can help the Army us prevent future defeats where it simply fails to see the message on the table--defeats, such as Vietnam, Beirut, and Mogadishu, where the reality is so blindingly apparent in retrospect.

¹William S. Lamers, *The Edge of Glory* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), 291.

²Mary Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie* (New York: Random House Value Publishing, 1997), 219.

³United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 Volumes (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880-1901) Series I, Volume 30, 253; hereafter referred to as *OR*.

CHAPTER 2

THE GENERAL COMMANDING

Any discussion of federal intelligence operations during the Chickamauga campaign needs to begin with a consideration of General William Starke Rosecrans, the General Commanding the Army of the Cumberland. A native of Ohio, great grandson of a signer of the Declaration of Independence and member of the West Point Class of 1842, Rosecrans was the key decision maker to be influenced by any intelligence gathered by the Army. To put it charitably, Rosecrans was a highly controversial character in his time and remains no less controversial among historians. Although he was for a time widely considered the most promising of Union generals, and favored by some for command of the Army of the Potomac, Rosecrans is now consigned to a dark and dusty corner of history, virtually unknown to the casual student of history. William M. Lamers, a noted biographer of Rosecrans, perhaps put it best in the introduction to his work *The Edge of Glory*: "What manner of man was this who won the unqualified, lifelong esteem and love of the admirable and forthright George H. Thomas, and the violent dislike of the generally moderate and reserved Ulysses S. Grant?"¹ While the life of this fascinating man is worthy of study at length, the comments will be restricted to those directly pertaining to his ability and readiness to develop an accurate picture of his Confederate opponents' intentions and incorporate this estimate into his own planning efforts.

Factors influencing Rosecrans' use of intelligence can be summarized in three major categories: personality, military training and experiences, and his command style and personal work routine.

Personality of General Rosecrans

Many influential works on Chickamauga have focused on Rosecrans' eccentricities in a quest to explain his ultimate "defeat." Glenn Tucker goes so far as to entitle the first section of his book as "Rosecrans--The Gifted Eccentric."² Any discussion of Rosecrans' eccentricities must be written with a view to the contemporary standard; Grant, Jackson, Sherman, Stuart--the list goes on, were certainly no less "unique" in their approach to war. The difference is that those commanders went in the "winner" category at the end of the war.

A dispassionate reading of the numerous accounts of General Rosecrans' personality reveals a complicated man, a conceptualizer and a planner who nevertheless suffered from several potential flaws that influenced his performance at Chickamauga.

Any effort to craft a word picture of Rosecrans would include the following adjectives: physically courageous, dedicated, attentive to detail, not afraid to "get his hands dirty," logical and mathematical in his approach to problem solving, logistically astute, supremely confident, quick thinking, decisive and judgmental.³ This description conveys some of the characteristics that had sustained Rosecrans in his rapid rise to prominence, from command of a provisional brigade of four regiments of three-month Ohio volunteers in May of 1861 to command of the second largest army in Federal service two years later.⁴

The word picture above is not, however, complete. A full description of Rosecrans would include these characteristics: proud, overly sensitive to slight--real or perceived, excitable, temperamental, quick to decide, and supremely confident. Note the presence of "supremely confident" in both the positive and negative lists--this will factor

in to Rosecrans' performance during the campaign. The characteristics listed in this paragraph are not desirable qualities in a commander at any level, and are particularly dangerous in a senior commander conducting far-flung operations relying on uncertain communications in difficult terrain. The cool, detached and dispassionate manner cultivated by senior commanders stands in marked contrast to the personality of Rosecrans. The strengths enumerated above are highly desirable in a staff officer or a commander operating in the raise, equip, and train phase of an army's operations. Rosecrans shared this talent and the associated fierce loyalty of his rank and file with another Federal general particularly adept at raising armies--George McClellan. The weaknesses enumerated only became apparent under the stress of combat. Rosecrans exacerbated these stresses in his personal command style rather than attempting to lessen their impact.

This description of Rosecrans is drawn from a relatively balanced set of sources. A less charitable acquaintance, *New York Herald* correspondent W. F. G. Shanks found Rosecrans "weak, theatrical, excitable, at times vehement and incoherent."⁵ Shanks' description would be seconded by many senior officers that were on the receiving end of Rosecrans' wrath--despite the fact their offenses were frequently the result of unclear instructions or understandable confusion.

A few brief notes on Rosecrans early life help to flesh out the framework that has been laid out. He was a man that took the radical step of converting to Catholicism from his native Methodism while still a cadet at West Point. He took this action in an era very different from the present, when conversion was not common, when the faith of one's fathers was very serious, and when Catholicism itself was controversial in America.

Rosecrans never wavered from his faith and influenced a younger brother to convert and enter the priesthood and eventually rise to be the first Bishop of the See of Columbus.⁶ Rosecrans was highly successful at West Point, graduating fifth of the fifty-one graduates in the Class of 1842. Twenty-nine of his classmates would rise to general officer rank (18 in Federal service, 11 in Confederate service). Among Rosecrans' classmates were his roommate, James Longstreet, Don Carlos Buell, Earl Van Dorn, and John Pope.⁷ Rosecrans was the first Westerner commissioned into the highly competitive Corps of Engineers, and his engineering background would shape his decision-making processes in later years.⁸ Rosecrans did not serve in the Mexican-American War, and the ambition seen throughout his life was ultimately incompatible with long service in the peacetime army. One characteristic that will have a bearing on Rosecrans' later performance in battle and particularly during the Chickamauga campaign first emerges in these early years. While on duty in Washington in 1853 it is reported that he "worked so hard his health gave way."⁹

Rosecrans resigned in 1854 over the objections of Secretary of War Jefferson Davis and entered business in the coal and oil industry. Rosecrans' industry and creativity led him to ultimate success in private life, although the path was not smooth or direct. An incident in 1859 further illustrates the determination of the man while once again highlighting a seeming inability to pace himself. Rosecrans was severely burned when a safety lamp he was developing exploded; it is of note that he had reportedly been working in his lab for sixteen days at the time of this incident.¹⁰ This is another indicator of an inability to set a sustainable pace of work for long-term projects.

Military Training and Experiences

The previously mentioned West Point education was General Rosecrans' primary source of military training. Rosecrans was a cadet during the reign of the noted professor and Jominian scholar Dennis Hart Mahan. In 1843 Rosecrans won a professorship in Mahan's Engineering Department at West Point and served four years in that billet. Mahan's influence on Rosecrans was noteworthy, and he was left with a lifelong enthusiasm for the campaigns of Napoleon and Frederick the Great.¹¹

One is struck with the modern tone of Rosecrans' operational thoughts and plans in his writings. He uses the distinctly maneuverist term of "dislocate" in reference to his efforts to force fortified positions and his track record in combat bore testament to his desire to use maneuver over frontal attacks.

Command Style and Routine

The daily routine of General Rosecrans while in garrison was as unconventional as the General himself. He rose at approximately 0800, met with his Chaplain for morning prayer, ate breakfast and attended to office duties until approximately 1400. At this time he would depart with his staff to visit subordinate units. The General and his staff always presented an impressive appearance; Rosecrans was precise in dress and demanded the same of his staff. During these "walkabouts" Rosecrans would frequently talk with private soldiers, inquiring as to their well-being and readiness. This now common act was controversial in Rosecrans' time and lent to his reputation for eccentricity. He was understanding and fatherly to his men, reserving harsher words for his officers. Dinner was held at the headquarters at 1600, followed by relaxation and personal time. From nightfall until midnight the General seemed to come to life and

serious work began in the headquarters. Orders and letters were dictated, and map study was an obsession of Rosecrans. Around midnight the work would wind down and Rosecrans would begin a “bull session” with his staff and subordinate commanders. Topics of discussion were wide-ranging, and there was an unusually informal air to the affair. These sessions would last late into the night, never ending before 0200 and frequently lasting much later.¹²

The night owl nature of Rosecrans was very unusual in his time. This was an era before electric lights, gas lighting was not widely available, and people generally adhered to Ben Franklin’s adage regarding “early to bed, early to rise” and the resultant benefits. The actual effect of this unconventional schedule was probably quite minimal during garrison operations when the commander had the luxury of rising at 0800 or later. On campaign, with the stress of momentous decisions, continuous movement on horse or foot, and the requirement for starting the day at dawn or earlier, Rosecrans’ schedule simply left him inadequately rested. The night before the battle of Corinth Rosecrans was up and about at 0300.¹³ The night before the second day of the battle Rosecrans retired at 0400.¹⁴ At Murfreesboro Rosecrans was so thoroughly exhausted after a nine-day campaign that he immediately took to his bed, diagnosed with “lung fever” as the result of his exertions.¹⁵ An additional factor was the strain this schedule placed on staff members with more “conventional” biorhythms.

Rosecrans’ relations with his adjacent and superior commanders would have a direct influence on intelligence operations during the Chickamauga campaign. As discussed above, Rosecrans had served under Grant in Mississippi during 1862, serving at the Battles of Iuka and Corinth. In both cases there had been serious failures of

coordination between these two generals. At Iuka poor coordination between Grant and Rosecrans permitted Confederate General Sterling Price to escape. Rosecrans faulted Grant for failure to launch a supporting attack; Grant held Rosecrans responsible for failing to block a specified road.¹⁶ At Corinth Rosecrans won a hard-earned victory, only to have Grant call off the pursuit (possibly for very sound reasons, but this was the cause of resentment nonetheless).¹⁷ In short, the two had not established an effective relationship, let alone a true bond.

Rosecrans' relationship with General Burnside to his east was similarly contentious. Burnside had become the odd-jobs officer for the Union after his humiliating defeat at Fredericksburg, yet he still let his ego get in the way of effective coordination with Rosecrans. Issues of seniority and prerogative would vex efforts to synchronize the actions of Burnside in eastern Tennessee around Knoxville and Rosecrans in Chattanooga with tragic results.

Rosecrans' relationship with the senior officials of the Army and government in Washington were even more contentious. There was well-documented bad blood between Rosecrans and Secretary of War Stanton dating to Rosecrans' activities in Virginia in 1862. General Halleck was a more neutral party and seemingly attempted to mediate between Rosecrans and Halleck, but even he had grown exasperated with Rosecrans' irreverent and downright challenging tone in official correspondence with Washington. Rosecrans was not above corresponding directly with the President as well, further complicating his standing with the Army leadership. The details of these relationships have been the meat of many books. The relevant essence for purposes of this study is that there was not a smooth or cooperative relationship between Rosecrans

and any of his immediately adjacent or superior commanders. This will have significant bearing on the timely sharing of intelligence and analysis during the Chickamauga campaign.

Summary

In summary William Starke Rosecrans was a man of great personal courage, organizationally and logistically astute but lacking in interpersonal skills. He was very intelligent and somewhat eccentric, but commanded great personal loyalty and was well liked by those that served under him. His relationships with superiors and peers were not as successful and would complicate operations. He was an engineer in the purest sense of the word, attentive to details and systemic in his approach. In modern terms he was a micromanager. His native intelligence, supreme self-confidence and record of success imbued him with an inclination to pass judgment rapidly and be highly confident of the correctness of his views. He demonstrated an inability to pace himself, and he regularly worked himself into an exhausted state. These characteristics, combined with an excitable nature, impaired his ability to synthesize ambiguous information and adjust his plans to a rapidly changing situation. Despite Rosecrans' many admirable qualities, the potential for a tragic failure to employ intelligence is clearly discernable in the general commanding.

¹William S. Lamers, *The Edge of Glory* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), 7.

²Glenn Tucker, *Chickamauga* (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Bookshop, 1976), 13.

³*Ibid.*, 38. Although the agenda and perspective differ, Rosecrans' friends and foes both agree on these traits.

⁴Ibid., 26.

⁵Ibid., 37.

⁶Ibid., 36.

⁷William S. Lamers, *The Edge of Glory* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), 13.

⁸Ibid., 14, status as first Westerner in the engineers only.

⁹Glenn Tucker, *Chickamauga* (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Bookshop, 1976), 34. No further details are provided regarding this important point.

¹⁰Ibid., 34.

¹¹William S. Lamers, *The Edge of Glory* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), 14-16.

¹²Glenn Tucker, *Chickamauga* (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Bookshop, 1976), 39-40.

¹³William S. Lamers, *The Edge of Glory* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), 136.

¹⁴Ibid., 145.

¹⁵Ibid., 244.

¹⁶Ibid., 116-117.

¹⁷Ibid., 168-169.

CHAPTER 3

INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS IN THE ARMY OF THE CUMBERLAND

The huge army mobilized by the United States to wage the Civil War presented innumerable challenges to the small cadre of professional soldiers with prewar experience in the United States Army. Among these challenges was the requirement to create a process for dealing with the large volume of intelligence reports inevitably generated by a field army in its daily operations. Of even great significance was the challenge of effectively directing the intelligence collection operations of the army and synthesizing the many sources of information into a coherent and sound estimate of the enemy's capabilities and probable course of action. While other staff sections evolved to attend to the manning and sustaining of the army (adjutants and quartermasters) and the emerging technology of the telegraph drove the creation of a fledgling signal corps to handle communications, intelligence remained largely the purview of the commanding officer. The resultant combination of primary operational planning authority and intelligence analysis responsibility in the commanding general proved to be a double-edged sword in General Rosecrans' campaign for Chattanooga.

The organization of Rosecrans' staff has been extensively studied and Robert D. Richardson's thesis *Rosecrans' Staff at Chickamauga* provides a detailed discussion of the full spectrum of staff functions and responsibilities.¹ Richardson demonstrates that Brigadier General Garfield acted as "chief clerk" in his role as chief of staff and that almost all information was funneled to Garfield's desk. Garfield was cast into the role of chief analyst, although seeing the record confirms that Rosecrans closely monitored all

intelligence reports and conducted his own analysis of the situation. Garfield's recent arrival to the army combined with the severe loss of the previous chief of staff, Colonel Julius P. Garesche, at the Battle of Stones River, to deprive General Rosecrans of a truly respected and trusted source of sound analysis. While Garfield was indubitably a man of great intellect and strong analytical powers he was completely untrained for his role as intelligence analyst and without practical experience that may have substituted for training.²

Edwin C. Fishel has produced a masterful overview of the development of intelligence operation within the Army of the Potomac, *The Secret War for the Union*. Fishel's work details the challenges of intelligence operations in a Civil War army and provides a framework for evaluating the success of generals of the era. Fishel identifies a framework for evaluating the success of Civil War-era commanders as intelligence gatherers and users. Three specific skills are identified in Fishel's model: gathering information, interpreting information and applying information. This model provides a sound framework for examining the intelligence structure of the Army of the Cumberland.³

Within the first skill, gathering information, Fishel identifies a number of disciplines as relevant in the Civil War. Communications intelligence consisted of interception of enemy flag and telegraph communications and the enemy's dispatches, orders and mail. There is no record of interception of flag or telegraph signals during the Chickamauga campaign. In rare instances the army was able to intercept written dispatches and the record demonstrates these were rapidly forwarded up the chain of command to the departmental headquarters. Interestingly these nuggets appear to have

received little emphasis at headquarters--perhaps fear of enemy disinformation was a factor, although the intentionally vague and discretionary nature of Confederate orders limited their value to the Union. Mail was aggressively exploited when captured-- Colonel Wilder's Lightning Brigade will be seen to excel in this task late in the campaign.

Closely related to communications intelligence is observation of enemy activities from selected observation posts. These posts usually coincided with the signal stations established by the signal corps on prominent terrain and so the signal corps emerged as the primary arm of observation in the Army of the Potomac. The terrain in the Chickamauga Campaign severely handicapped similar efforts. Early in the campaign, when the armies face one another across the Tennessee River, backed by high hills on either bank, observation plays a limited role. Later in the campaign the extremely hilly terrain limited the stations to reporting large dust clouds in some general direction--the signal corps proves to be of minimal value in performing observation operations. Fishel describes the Army of the Potomac's extensive experimentation with hot-air balloons, however the limitations of the bulky gas generating equipment precluded their use in the difficult mountains of Tennessee.

Examination of enemy newspapers, now referred to as "OSINT" or open source intelligence, was a critical discipline in the Civil War. Advance elements of the Army of the Cumberland go to great lengths to obtain daily copies of the various rebel newspapers, and the senior commanders of the Union Army included newspaper reports in their telegrams to and from Washington to assist in developing overarching situational

awareness. Rosecrans, Garfield and Halleck personally devoured whatever enemy newspapers could be procured and were highly receptive to reporting therein.

In addition to the relatively “technical” collection means identified above, the primary collection source was human. Human intelligence operations in the Civil War can be broken into three broad categories; espionage (the recruitment of spies within the enemy camp), debriefings and interrogations of prisoners, deserters and loyal citizens, reconnaissance (normally by cavalry), and scouting (deep reconnaissance operations by individuals or small groups).

The record provides no documentation of any active spies or agents at the disposal of the Army of the Cumberland operating in General Bragg’s army. The army’s “spymaster” was a rather shady figure, “Colonel” (an honorific title) William Truesdail. Truesdail’s primary function was as Chief of Police, however he cultivated a number of informants in addition to running several lucrative if unsavory businesses. Truesdail was to spend the Chickamauga Campaign in Nashville and the activities of his police service (variously described as the Army Police, Detective Police and Secret Police in documents) achieved public prominence in October and November of 1863 when alleged excesses and improprieties were documented by the Cincinnati Daily Commercial. The newspaper cited various officers as referring to Truesdail’s police as “Truesdail’s Forty Thieves” and “A d---d swindling, thieving organization and a curse to the army.”⁴ Whatever the merit of the charges, Truesdail was obviously heavily engaged in his various police and commercial duties and was not directing a coherent offensive espionage campaign against Bragg.

Debriefings and interrogations were the primary source of information regarding the enemy during the campaign. Commanders at all echelons were aggressive in conducting debriefing and interrogation operations and the record shows these reports were rapidly forwarded to relevant headquarters. Particularly valuable reports were routinely submitted directly to departmental headquarters skipping echelons of command. Information copies were generally provided to satisfy chain of command protocols and in no instance is there any evidence of senior commanders taking offense at these violations of strict chain of command. The record also reveals that Rosecrans and Garfield closely monitored these reports. If there is a flaw in the army's handling of this source of information there was virtually no prioritizing or evaluation of the reports. Rather Rosecrans and Garfield simply acknowledged the reports that reinforced their perception of the enemy and dismissed those reports that were inconsistent with that perception until evidence became overwhelming. An additional weakness was an inclination to ascribe the same value to reports from deserters, prisoners and citizens alike with little differentiation or acknowledgement of the widely varying motivations of these sources.

Reconnaissance operations within the Army of the Cumberland will emerge as a central theme in the following narrative. The cavalry of the army was concentrated into Major General Stanley's Cavalry Corps operating on the extreme right flank with only two brigades detached for service on the left flank of the army (Wilder's and Minty's brigades) and no mounted troops assigned to the critical central sector of the army's frontage. Rosecrans had long complained to Washington regarding his limited mounted resources, however he clearly compounded his own problem by his method of employing his cavalry. Rosecrans concentrated his cavalry on his most distant flank, assigned them

contradictory deep strike and reconnaissance tasks, tolerated extremely poor quality reporting and lack of aggressiveness early in the campaign and failed to replace Stanley promptly when repeated scolding yielded no improvement. Ultimately the greatest failing of the Federal cavalry would prove to be their complete absence from the decisive sector in the campaign. General Thomas would be compelled to advance blindly into the teeth of the Confederate trap at McLemore's Cove due to the detachment of his only organic mounted force (Wilder's Brigade) to cover the left flank of the army.

Scouting, defined as reconnaissance operations by individuals or small groups, was a much happier story in the Army of the Cumberland. A large measure of this success is due to the decentralized nature of scouting operations in the army. Commanders from brigade level on up to corps employed their own scouts to gather information. These scouts included active service soldiers, volunteer loyal citizens and paid scouts from among the citizenry and deserters. Scouting operations emerge as the best source of tactical information in the campaign and stand as a close second to debriefings and interrogations for operational and strategic intelligence. The aggressiveness and quality of scouting operations varied greatly from unit to unit, and the credibility accorded to scouting reports from subordinates similarly varied greatly.

The Army of the Cumberland's success or lack thereof at interpreting information will be addressed in detail in the following chapters. In summary the army suffered from the lack of a dedicated analysis cell operating independently of the daily stresses of maneuvering and sustaining the army in the field. Both Garfield and Rosecrans were seriously handicapped in interpreting information by their close association with the

Union campaign plan. Achieving a dispassionate view of the situation and conducting objective analysis of the situation ultimately proved beyond their capabilities.

The final function in Mr. Fishel's model, applying information or intelligence to operations, was curiously rather well integrated in the Army of the Cumberland. When Garfield and Rosecrans received information they chose to believe, or when they received multiple confirmatory reports from a number of sources, they acted quickly to disseminate their understanding of the situation and issued appropriate orders.

Rosecrans' dispatches to Halleck in Washington and Burnside on his eastern flank reveal his estimate of the situation in clear terms, even when that estimate was mistaken.

Garfield's orders to the corps commanders clearly communicate the current estimate of the enemy and link Union actions to Confederate actions. A serious flaw is revealed late in the campaign when the situation becomes less clear. Rosecrans and Garfield appear to use differing estimates of the enemy situation in order to manipulate their subordinate commanders--a grievous error which could have led to far more catastrophic defeat than eventually occurred on the banks of the Chickamauga.

¹Robert D. Richardson, "Rosecrans' Staff at Chickamauga: The Significance of Major General William S. Rosecrans' Staff on the Outcome of the Chickamauga Campaign" (Master's thesis, United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas).

²Richardson, 137.

³Fishel, 570-571.

⁴*Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, 3 November 1863.

CHAPTER 4

THE CAMPAIGN

You say there were mistakes in that campaign. Aftersight is always better than foresight. But in its light now, I know of no mistakes in that campaign except that of not telegraphing a glorious victory at Chickamauga.¹

The Honorable W. S. Rosecrans

The above citation from a letter written by General Rosecrans twenty years after the battle of Chickamauga clearly states that the basic events of the campaign were in keeping with Rosecrans' intent. The operational level maneuver prior to the clash in McLemore's Cove is generally acknowledged as exemplary in concept. Rosecrans succeeded in his primary objective for the campaign, the occupation of the critical transportation node of Chattanooga--the "Gateway to the Deep South"--which he consistently identified as the "objective point" for the campaign throughout planning, execution and subsequent defense in official documents. Criticism leveled at Rosecrans focuses on the critical period between the seizure of Chattanooga on 9 September and the pitched battle along the banks of Chickamauga Creek on 9 to 20 September 1863.

A review of the basic concept of the operation and identification of specific "decision points" is appropriate prior to detailed examination of factors influencing Rosecrans' actions. The term decision point is a modern one but the concept is fundamental regardless of the terminology. Decision points are defined in current U.S. Army doctrine as "events or locations on the battlefield where tactical decisions are required during mission execution. Decision points do not dictate what the decision is, only that one must be made. . . ."² It is important to note that the decision to not do

anything, to continue one's course of action as originally planned, constitutes an active decision in this construct. While modern officers are trained to identify decision points during their planning for an operation and to consider the implication of each decision in advance, examination of original Civil War documents reveals a grasp of this same concept by the generals of the time. Rosecrans' orders and subsequent testimony reveals he would be comfortable with this modern concept which merely codifies a method of thinking that commanding officers have used since ancient times.

Examination of Rosecrans' actions at each major decision point during the Chickamauga Campaign serves to demonstrate a methodical and disciplined decision-making process and will support subsequent consideration of his decision-making and use of intelligence in the critical phase of the campaign.

The first decision Rosecrans' faced was determining his "line of operations" across the challenging geographic obstacles he faced. Rosecrans' after-action report submitted for the Official Record demonstrates a superb mastery of the impact of terrain on operations and logistics. Modern intelligence officers would be well served by using his discussion of the challenges presented by the Cumberland range of mountains, the Tennessee River and the geographical significance of Chattanooga itself as a model for terrain analysis at the operational level.³ Of particular note is the integration of logistical considerations. Rosecrans planned thoroughly for the sustainment of his force over difficult terrain over narrow lines of communication, and this proved to be the determining factor in his selection of a main crossing point over the Tennessee River downstream of Chattanooga in the vicinity of Stevenson and Bridgeport. Rosecrans definitively states that logistics was the dominant consideration in this decision in a post-

war letter to Confederate General D. H. Hill. Hill questioned Rosecrans on this point because tactical considerations alone would have driven Rosecrans to cross upstream or northeast of Chattanooga to permit greater coordination with General Burnside's Army of the Ohio operating in the vicinity of Knoxville.⁴

Based on his selection of a line of operations to the southwest of Chattanooga Rosecrans next developed his general scheme of maneuver for his force to attain his primary objective. The Army of the Cumberland advanced with three corps forward and one reserve corps. General Crittenden's XXI Army Corps moved on the eastern side, General Thomas' XIV Army Corps in the center and General McCook's XX Army Corps on the west. Cavalry employment is of greater significance to our discussion of intelligence operations. Two brigades of cavalry were assigned to assist Crittenden in conducting deception operations and screening to the east to deceive General Bragg regarding the true point of main effort and reinforce his expectation that the Army of the Cumberland would cross the Tennessee upstream of Chattanooga. Rosecrans placed the Cavalry Corps under Brigadier General Stanley on the western flank with three of his five brigades assigned to screen the line of the Tennessee River to the southwest toward Pikeville, Alabama, some fifteen miles distant.⁵ This pattern of commitment of his very limited cavalry to the extreme flanks of his widely dispersed army would continue throughout the campaign and negatively affect the conduct of operations in later phases. The approach to the Tennessee River was conducted between 16 to 20 August, and preparations for crossing the river commenced.

The actual river crossing was conducted between 29 August and 4 September and is generally acknowledged as a superb example of this kind of operation. By 8

September Rosecrans had successfully moved three full corps and one cavalry corps across the Tennessee River in some of the most severe terrain any commander faced in the Civil War. This entire movement was conducted under the observation of Confederate pickets and observers posted in the mountains to the south of the river as recognized by Rosecrans in his official report--he relied on his active deception effort upstream of Chattanooga and the restrictive terrain south of the river to protect his actual crossing. The Army of the Cumberland now advanced on a wide frontage with three corps abreast, maintaining their previous alignment with McCook to the south centered on Valley Head, Alabama (thirty-five air miles from Chattanooga--significantly more by mountain road), Thomas in the center oriented on Trenton, Georgia, and Crittenden in the north moving along the Tennessee River toward Lookout Mountain. Movements of the corps into these relative positions were complete by 8 September. Cavalry remained committed on the extreme flanks of the army. Crittenden's brigades remained on the north side of the river opposite Chattanooga and the Cavalry Corps was directed to "take post at Rawlingsville and reconnoiter boldly toward Rome and Alpine," far to the rear of any known enemy force and well out of easy communications with the Army Headquarters which was now located in Trenton.⁶ Stanley and the Cavalry Corps failed to accomplish their task, as we shall see when we examine this phase in detail, but at this time Rosecrans believed his cavalry was in position. At this point Rosecrans now faced several northeast-southwest ridgelines that effectively blocked his ability to gather information on the enemy to the immediate front of his three corps and his cavalry was completely committed to the flanks of his force.

Rosecrans now reached a major decision point prior to beginning the next phase of his operation. He was aware of enemy efforts to reinforce Bragg and concentrate forces including Buckner's Corps from Knoxville and elements of Johnston's army from Mississippi in the Chattanooga area. He was not yet aware of Confederate intent to dispatch General Longstreet's Corps from the Army of Northern Virginia as well. Rosecrans estimated he had two possible courses of action--"carry Lookout Mountain" or directly assault the commanding heights immediately southwest of the city "or to move as to compel him (Bragg) to quit his position by endangering his line of communication." On 8 September Rosecrans implemented his decision to cut Bragg's lines of communication and ordered a general advance east through the mountains across his frontage, with Crittenden under orders to conduct reconnaissance in force toward Lookout Mountain and to be prepared to exploit the anticipated enemy withdrawal from Chattanooga. The Cavalry Corps was committed even deeper into the enemy rear and directed to "strike the enemy's railroad communication between Resaca Bridge and Dalton." Not only was the cavalry now committed to a distant flank out of clear communications, it was now assigned a combat task--making it unavailable for tasking in a reconnaissance role. The conflicting nature of these roles and the cost to intelligence collection will be discussed in detail later in this paper. An essential element of the orders to his corps commanders during this phase that will later play a major role in the battle was his instruction to McCook to advance to Alpine to support the cavalry "with one division."⁷

Things started happening quickly at this point, and in this critical phase the Federal forces were to completely lose track of General Bragg's army. Crittenden

discovered early on 9 September that the Confederates had evacuated the city the day prior and by 1300 that day Federal forces occupied Chattanooga.

The nation rejoiced at this success and Rosecrans reached a major new decision point. He had achieved his stated objective for the campaign. Now colocated with General Thomas at Trenton Rosecrans was faced with numerous options on 9 September. He could pursue Bragg's retreating Army. He could consolidate and establish defensive positions close to the city and shift his logistical base of operations to Chattanooga, or he could push his forces forward to block any Confederate attempt to re-take Chattanooga from the south. Detailed examination of the decisions taken between this day and 12 September will constitute the critical portion of this thesis.

It is the contention of this author that Rosecrans decided to pursue Bragg at this point, seeking the decisive victory that had eluded him in so many previous instances. Numerous factors influenced this decision, including an extremely poor awareness of the enemy born of inadequate intelligence operations and poor analysis of available reports, a prevailing atmosphere of imminent victory and pressures from Washington and the Administration to strike the death blow of the Confederacy prior to the onset of winter. Rosecrans' postwar writings consistently state his intent at this point was to move to ground of his choice to fight a defensive battle against the inevitable Confederate counterattack, although the record does not entirely support this position.

At this critical decision point Rosecrans did very little to alter his previous concept, basing his decision on an erroneous perception that Bragg was retreating to Rome, Georgia. Crittenden was directed to occupy Chattanooga with one brigade and "follow the enemy's retreat vigorously, anticipating that the main body had retired by

Ringgold and Dalton.” Thomas was to continue his previous tasking of occupying the head of McLemore’s Cove (only one day had passed since the initial order) and McCook’s orders were similarly unchanged.

At this critical juncture Rosecrans chose to move his headquarters to Chattanooga, displacing on 10 September.⁸ This moved him from the center of his widespread army to the extreme left flank, well over fifty miles from his right flank. In addition to the disruption that accompanies the displacement of a field headquarters this greatly lengthened the lines of communication and handicapped the passing of information and exercise of command. This displacement while the army was widely dispersed in pursuit of a foe known to have been strongly reinforced, when the location of the enemy force was clearly unknown and when a strong enemy counterattack was completely expected by General Rosecrans’ own account represents a poor decision that has not been fully considered in previous works.

The terrible reality of the Union situation became apparent to Rosecrans and his corps commanders as reports accumulated in the following days. By 1930 on 12 September McCook had recognized the situation and made the call: “Think that LaFayette is Bragg’s strategic point, has his way open from there to Dalton & further south on the RR and his purpose probably to oppose his whole force to our fraction as they debouch from the mountains.”⁹ The next morning at 0645 on 13 September Thomas reached the same conclusion, stating that “Bragg is concentrating his entire army at LaFayette” and recommending the army close on him in McLemore’s Cove.¹⁰

Faced with this situation, and with increasing reports that elements of the Army of Northern Virginia were moving into the area (General Halleck in Washington received

the first credible reports of this movement on 13 September).¹² Rosecrans now moved quickly to consolidate his forces. The Army of Cumberland was facing a concentrated enemy force while dispersed over a forty-mile frontage by the best roads and fifty-seven miles by the route ultimately used by McCook's corps on the southern flank.¹³ At 1300 on 13 September Rosecrans departed Chattanooga with his personal staff enroute to rejoin General Thomas in Trenton and oversee the reconstitution of the army, improving his ability to command the operation.¹⁴

Rosecrans had successfully breached the formidable Cumberland Plateau, crossed the Tennessee River and seized the critical city of Chattanooga by his actions. Now the Army of the Cumberland frantically sought to consolidate its 57,840 men as it faced battle against concentrated Confederate forces numbering approximately 68,000 men--the only major battle of the war where the South would have a significant numerical superiority.¹⁵ Poor intelligence operations and inadequate analysis of available reporting had played a critical role in delivering the Army of the Cumberland to this field under these conditions. Critical analysis of these intelligence operations and reporting follows.

¹W. S. Rosecrans, Letter to General George Opedyke dated 28 February 1884, located in the Opdyke Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio.

²United States Department of the Army FM 101-5, *Staff Organization and Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, 31 May 1997), 5-18.

³United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, Volume 30, 47-50; hereafter referred to as *OR*; additionally, all subsequent references to the *OR* will be from Series I unless otherwise indicated.

⁴W.S. Rosecrans, Letter to General D.H. Hill dated 26 August 1884, located in the D. H. Hill Papers, Virginia State Library.

⁵*OR*, Vol. 30, Part I, 51.

⁶*Ibid.*, 52.

⁷*Ibid.*, 53.

⁸William S. Lamers, *The Edge of Glory* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), 310.

⁹McCook dispatch to Rosecrans dated 1930 12 September 1863, Summaries of the News Reaching Headquarters of General W.S. Rosecrans, 1863-64, RG 393, part 1, entry 986, National Archives, Washington, DC.

¹⁰Thomas dispatch to Rosecrans dated 0645 13 September 1863.

¹²*OR*, Vol. 30, Part I, 35.

¹³*OR*, Vol. 30, Part I, 54.

¹⁴William S. Lamers, *The Edge of Glory* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), 314.

¹⁵Peter Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound* (Urbana, Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 1992), 534.

CHAPTER 5
MOVEMENT TO THE TENNESSEE RIVER
11-20 AUGUST 1863

In the following three chapters a detailed examination of intelligence operations conducted by the Army of the Cumberland and information known to have been received at General Rosecrans' Headquarters. An analysis of the actions taken by the general will be made. The previously introduced concept of Decision Points will form the basis for identifying specific pieces of information and events that shaped the Chickamauga Campaign.

General Rosecrans had an accurate intelligence picture of his foe as he prepared for the advance on Chattanooga. The preponderance of deserter, scout, and agent reporting throughout the month of July painted a consistent picture. General Bragg had fallen back across the Tennessee River and was throwing up works in the immediate vicinity of Chattanooga. Opinions varied on the quality of the fortifications--some sources reported they rivaled those of Tullahoma, others considered them minimal. There were virtually no Confederate infantry operating north of the river. Forrest's cavalry were reported to be operating in the Sequatchie Valley on an irregular basis, primarily foraging. Bragg's headquarters was accurately reported to be in Chattanooga itself. The array of Southern forces was known with considerable accuracy. The total strength of Bragg's army was reported as 25-30,000 by a loyal citizen who departed Chattanooga 13 July.¹ An agent working for the Chief of Secret Police Colonel Truesdail reported Bragg's strength at 27-30,000. The agent declared "This is correct" stating the information came from a source "who certainly knew."² The 20 August returns for the

Army of Tennessee listed "28,260 Effective total" organized in two army corps with a further "10,062 Effective total" in Wheeler's Cavalry Corps and Forrest's Cavalry Division.³ These forces were generally concentrated south of Chattanooga itself, with "four divisions near Chattanooga, commanded by Cheatham, Withers Claybourn and Stewart" reported by one of Colonel Truesdail's scouts on 25 July. The number of divisions reported is correct, although Major General T. C. Hindman was to assume command of Withers' division on 13 August per Special Order Number 216.⁴ One brigade of infantry was correctly reported to be located near Bridgeport, to the west of Chattanooga. Wheeler's Cavalry Corps was reported off to the southwest, variously reported as at Rome or Trenton, Georgia.⁵

Multiple reports indicated General Bragg was concerned about his western flank and feared a Federal advance from the general direction of Huntsville, Alabama, toward Rome, Georgia. Frequent mention of the relatively insignificant town of Rome occurs in deserter and agent reports. Press reporting of the April 1863 defeat of Colonel Abel D. Streight's Federal Cavalry Brigade by Forrest's Cavalry Corps in the vicinity of Rome may account for this common reference. Morale within the Southern forces was widely reported as poor, with high rates of desertion (particularly among Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi troops) and general dissatisfaction with Bragg's generalship.

Just after midnight on 11 August General Rosecrans reported to General Halleck from his headquarters at Winchester, Tennessee the advance of two divisions (1st under Major General Absalom Baird and 2nd under Major General James S. Negley) of XIV Corps toward Stevenson via Cowan along the western avenue of approach to the Tennessee River. Colonel Minty's cavalry had engaged Dibrell's Confederate cavalry in

the vicinity of Sparta (approximately 50 miles northeast of the Tullahoma-Stevenson line of operations) on 10 August and pushed them south, commencing the counter-reconnaissance sweep of the eastern sector to support deception operations. McCook's cavalry division was to leave Fayetteville later in the day on 11 August and move southeast, heading to the Tennessee River near where the Huntsville Railroad crosses. These actions put the Army of the Cumberland in motion with cavalry deployed to the flanks on a frontage of over 88 miles.⁶ On 11 August a John B. Rodgers, presumably a loyal citizen, reported from McMinnville, Tennessee, that "information from a reliable source" indicated Colonel Dibrell of General Forrest's Cavalry Division was sent to White and Van Buren Counties to "devastate the country before the Federal troops can occupy it." White and Van Buren Counties are located approximately fifteen miles east of McMinnville. This report was addressed to a Dr. J. D. Hale.⁷

By 2200 on 12 August Rosecrans was able to report to General Halleck that Baird's division was in position near Stevenson, Alabama. Rosecrans had received no updates on the progress of his cavalry, although Colonel Edward McCook's division was in Huntsville, Alabama, that day, preparing to move to Larkinsville, Alabama, near the Tennessee River approximately twenty miles southwest of Stevenson. Almost as an afterthought, and without elaboration regarding his source, Rosecrans reported "Rebels expect us above Chattanooga."⁸ The laconic nature of Rosecrans' declaration infers he had a source of some reliability providing this information, although no specific report is available in the records.

Gathering information on routes and road conditions between the army's cantonments to the north and the Tennessee River received considerable attention.

Cavalry as well as infantry commanders are recorded sending detailed information and sketches, with particular attention to the challenges of moving heavy wagons and batteries over the roads. General Lytle forwarded a report based on a debriefing of deserters gathered by his command at Bridgeport. The deserters reported a brigade of five regiments reinforced by a battalion of sharpshooters and a battery of artillery picketing twelve miles of the Tennessee River between Island Creek to Battle Creek, generally opposite Bridgeport. The deserters were Mississippi men and reported that discontent had grown amongst their fellow Mississippians since the fall of Vicksburg. The regiments reported by the deserters correlate precisely with Anderson's brigade of Hindman's division, which was indeed posted as the sole Confederate infantry force along the Tennessee west of Chattanooga.⁹

By midday on 13 August Rosecrans could report to General Halleck that his forces continued to advance on a broad front, with cavalry from Stanley's corps on the Tennessee River covering the Huntsville-Stevenson Road on the southwest flank, Reynolds' division moving over the mountains to Jasper and Battle Creek in the center of the army frontage and Crittenden's corps dispatched to Tracy City enroute to the eastern sector. Once again Rosecrans demonstrated an awareness of the enemy with the brief notation "Enemy in same position" at the end of his telegram.¹⁰

On 13 August Major General Sheridan displayed an emphasis on intelligence collection from his forward location at Stevenson: "There is a report here this evening that Burnside's troops are passing through Big Creek and Wheeler's Gaps; it comes from rebel sources." Sheridan additionally forwarded a substantial report from Brigadier General Lytle at Bridgeport. On 13 August Lytle's men had captured rebel couriers with

dispatches that were promptly forwarded, reported enemy activity along the river and had dispatched a patrol to Island Creek Ferry. A "Mr. B" is referenced in an informal way, indicating he was a known source of information or a scout. Mr. B's latest take was that day's edition of the *Chattanooga Rebel* which was forwarded up the chain of command. Lytle went on to conduct hasty analysis of an intercepted dispatch and concluded "The Rice referred to in dispatches must have his headquarters in Anderson." Lytle then fused this information with a report from that day's patrol to Island Creek that "Rice is patrolling the river." Finally Lytle stated his intent to forward for debriefing refugees that had been determined by questioning to have potentially useful information. This brief report demonstrates a high degree of intelligence awareness. A majority of Civil War era collection methods are highlighted, including source and scout reporting, front line observations by pickets, open source intelligence (newspaper) gathered by a source, debriefing of refugees, prisoner interrogation and rapid exploitation and analysis of captured documents.¹¹

Another aspect of intelligence operations was demonstrated in a message from Brigadier General Van Cleve which updated the counter-reconnaissance efforts of Colonel Minty's cavalry versus the Confederate cavalry command of Dibrell on the east flank near Sparta. Efforts to sweep the eastern sector of enemy observation to support the upcoming deception operation by Crittenden's corps continued to feature prominently in operational traffic.¹²

During the period 14 to 15 August preparations for the advance of the army to the Tennessee continued. Major General Sheridan submitted a report at 1120 on 14 August

directly to Brigadier General Garfield at army headquarters indicating continuing source operations. Sheridan reported:

I would not be much surprised if a large portion of Bragg's army was going to Atlanta. Up to the 5th of August three brigades had reached there, and engineers were actively engaged in surveying. They sent a man through the lines last night to tell me there were 40,000 men at Knoxville. I have bagged him. They dread an attack via Rome, but have but little idea of an advance on Chattanooga. A cavalry demonstration at Guntersville and a cavalry reconnaissance opposite Chattanooga shortly afterward will probably find but few rebels there. I may have more positive information this evening.¹³

This report demonstrated continuing aggressive intelligence collection operations by Sheridan. The details regarding Confederate awareness of the battlefield indicate Sheridan had a source he considered credible that had access to a senior headquarters in Bragg's army, and his hope for "more positive information this evening" indicates regular information exchanges were occurring. The obviously inflated report of Confederate strength at Knoxville was handily dismissed by Sheridan and the source was fired or "bagged." Whether this was deliberate disinformation or merely boasting by a deserter or volunteer spy is unknown. The essence of the report--Confederate lack of situational awareness and concern for their lines of communication--is correct. The specific mention of Rome as point of concern is significant. As the campaign progressed Rosecrans showed a willingness to believe Bragg's army was retreating to Rome despite flimsy evidence; this report may be the genesis of that flawed estimate.

Rosecrans issued orders on 15 August for the general advance of the army to begin the next day. Rosecrans provided detailed instructions for the employment of the limited cavalry and aggressive reconnaissance by all units. Enemy units north of the river and details regarding "all available means of crossing" were assigned as priority

collection requirements. The Cavalry Corps continued to be committed to the southwest flank, leaving only Minty's and Wilder's brigades on the northeastern flank.¹⁴

Throughout the day intelligence reporting continued to flow into the army headquarters from Generals Sheridan and Lytle on the north bank of the Tennessee River, primarily reports of rebel cavalry activity to the east of Jasper and picket actions along the south bank of the Tennessee River. Lytle's report of 7:30 PM is of note as it cites an "old Kelley" providing information of Confederate actions. Kelley's dispatch was brought to Lytle by "negroes," demonstrating at least a semiorganized courier system supporting the actions of an informant.¹⁵ Rosecrans was personally following these reports closely, as confirmed by a dispatch signed by Rosecrans to Sheridan on 15 August directing Lytle to count previously reported fires and beware of "humbug" or enemy deception. Rosecrans also followed up on Sheridan's 14 August report with the query "Have you anything to confirm your suspicions of last night as to enemy's leaving?"¹⁶

On 16 August the army commenced the move to the Tennessee River. Major General Sheridan's division maintained vigilant watch on the river and relayed that according to a rebel deserter the previously reported fires were nothing more than the troops cooking two days of rations. Sheridan stated, "I am still of the impression that they are moving off, but have no additional information." The aggressive reconnaissance of Lytle's brigade included a scouting mission by an individual named Pike who floated in the dugout down the river the night of the 15 August.¹⁷

The debriefing report of a R. Henderson dated 8 August 1863 was entered into the XIV Corps' journal of operations on 16 August. This individual reported on the

disposition of Confederate forces (dispersed around Chattanooga) and the morale of the force. He reported widespread dissatisfaction with General Bragg amongst the troops and a prevailing attitude that Bragg would "retreat as soon as an advance is made, and they expect a movement in the direction of Rome, Ga., which they all fear." Henderson had left Chattanooga on 29 July and reported that Generals Bragg, Polk, and D. H. Hill were present at the city on that date. He also reported that "Hardee had been sent to Mississippi--no force went with him--and Hill took his place in Bragg's army."¹⁸ The accuracy of this verifiable information probably lent credibility to Henderson's opinions on enemy intent.

The recurring mention of Rome as a point of concern in intelligence reports merits some consideration. Rome sat at the end of a rail spur, and was not a station en-route to the major depot for the army in Atlanta. The apparently widespread concern at the soldier level for Rome, Georgia, may actually indicate a concern for the tenuous line of communications via rail to Atlanta with Rome merely chosen as the most significant landmark along that general route. This when combined with the previously mentioned defeat of the Streight Raid by Forrest in April 1863 is a possible explanation for the repeated references to Rome from a variety of low-level sources.

On 17 August Rosecrans once again had access to a recent copy of the *Chattanooga Rebel* at his headquarters in Winchester, Tennessee. Rosecrans promptly telegraphed General Halleck a summary of an article regarding actions at Charleston, South Carolina. The cross-cueing between theaters and the emphasis enemy newspapers received continues to indicate a high degree of personal interest and involvement by the general commanding.

Also on the seventeenth a dated and somewhat irrelevant report of operations by Confederate General Forrest in the Sparta area exhibits good understanding of intelligence principles. The drafter identifies the source as a “confidential citizen scout” and the information is considered reliable as it was “confirmed by a deserter.”¹⁹

Brigadier General Lytle’s men continued their efforts to gather information. The previously mentioned source “Holmes” at Island Creek Ferry engaged a Confederate picket in conversation while Federal officers hid within earshot. The information gathered was of little value, but the effort demonstrated initiative and continued focus on the task of gathering intelligence.²⁰

On 18 August the Army of the Cumberland’s headquarters moved forward to Stevenson, to a site previously selected by Major General Sheridan based partially on concealment from rebel observation. This movement closer to the front lines--virtually within sight of Confederate pickets--with ready access to a good lateral road and the river itself, would greatly improve the ability to share intelligence between the widely separated elements of the army.

The nineteenth of August yielded the first reporting generated by signal corps stations emplaced on the hills above the Tennessee River. Unfortunately, the nature of the terrain limited their effectiveness. A station atop a mountain near Battle Creek reported “pickets in small squads” and a railroad train running east toward Chattanooga.²¹

An ironic exchange of telegrams occurred between General-in-Chief Halleck and Major General Rosecrans on 20 August. At this precise moment Southern advocates of increasing the strength of General Bragg’s army (the so-called “western concentration bloc”) were increasing their calls for a shift of forces from Virginia to Tennessee--

Lieutenant General James Longstreet himself wrote a letter encouraging this shift to Senator Wigfall on 18 August. As Confederate hopes swung west Halleck inquired of Rosecrans whether he could verify "that some portion of Bragg's army has been sent to Richmond to re-inforce Lee," adding "It is important that the truth of this report be ascertained as early as possible." Rosecrans replied promptly that same day, stating that he had no corroborating information and that only Cleburne's and Stewart's divisions were unlocated, and they were reported at Atlanta.²² The basis of Rosecrans' statement regarding Cleburne's and Stewart's divisions is unknown--as cited above there was substantial reporting indicating those two divisions were present at Chattanooga.

General Rosecrans considered this first phase of his campaign complete on 20 August when his corps were in their designated positions ready to begin preparations for the river crossing. The Army of the Cumberland had effectively shielded its advance to the Tennessee by aggressive counter-reconnaissance operations and advancing on a wide frontage. Confederate shock on 21 August when Colonel John T. Wilder's Lightning Brigade commenced demonstration operations (including a bombardment of Chattanooga itself) as part of the army's diversion to the north of Chattanooga would testify to this success.²³ General Bragg's after-action report for the campaign indicates the diversionary move by Crittenden's corps was noted, did indeed deceive Bragg and had further unexpected effect. Bragg wrote:

Immediately after crossing the mountains to the Tennessee the enemy threw a corps by way of Sequatchie Valley, to strike the rear of General Buckner's command, while Burnside occupied him in front. One division already ordered to his assistance proving insufficient to meet the force concentrating on him, Buckner was directed to withdraw to the Hiwassee with his infantry, artillery and supplies, and to hold his cavalry in front to check the enemy's advance. As soon

as this change was made the corps threatening his rear was withdrawn, and the enemy commenced a movement in force against our left and rear.²⁴

Thus Rosecrans deception succeeded in diverting Bragg's attention to the north and east of Chattanooga, although an unfortunate result of this diversion was the withdrawal of Buckner's corps from their isolated position at Knoxville to a location much closer to Chattanooga.

Rosecrans now faced his first significant decision point of the campaign--where to cross the Tennessee River. While generally accurate intelligence had been collected regarding the disposition of Confederate forces in the immediate river valley there was a noticeable dearth of information concerning Confederate disposition and intent beyond the river. Intelligence operations would now have to focus on satisfying these critical requirements to support accurate decision-making by the general commanding during the actual crossing operation.

¹Summaries of the News Reaching Headquarters of General W. S. Rosecrans, 1863-1864, 3393, part 1, entry 986, National Archives, Washington, DC (henceforth referred to as "Summaries of the News"), Report of P. M. P. of Marion County.

²Summaries of the News, report of an unidentified agent who traveled to Chattanooga 13-15 July 1863.

³OR Vol 30, Part IV, 519.

⁴OR, Vol 30, Part IV, 495.

⁵Summaaries of News, 25 July 1863 report of M. D. Thompson.

⁶OR, Vol 30, Part III, 4.

⁷OR, Vol 30, Part III, 7.

⁸OR, Vol 30, Part III, 11.

⁹OR, Vol 30, Part III, 14, confirming information on Anderson's Brigade from OR, Vol 30, Part II, 15.

¹⁰OR, Vol 30, Part III, 19.

¹¹OR, Vol 30, Part III, 20. The "Rice" referred to is probably Colonel Horace Rice, Commanding Officer of the 29th Tennessee, part of Smith's Brigade, Cheatham's Division, Polk's Corps, see OR Vol. 30, Part II, 11.

¹²OR, Vol 30, Part III, 21.

¹³OR, Vol 30, Part III, 29.

¹⁴OR, Vol 30, Part III, 36.

¹⁵OR, Vol 30, Part III, 39.

¹⁶OR, Vol 30, Part III, 52.

¹⁷OR, Vol 30, Part III, 52.

¹⁸OR, Vol 30, Part III, 48-49.

¹⁹OR, Vol 30, Part III, 56.

²⁰OR, Vol 30, Part III, 59.

²¹OR, Vol 30, Part III, 76.

²²OR, Vol 30, Part III, 83.

²³OR, Vol 30, Part III, 51, see also Cozzens, 36.

²⁴OR, Vol 30, Part III, 27.

CHAPTER 6
OVER THE RIVER
20 AUGUST-2 SEPTEMBER 1863

The next phase of the campaign can be broken into two distinct tasks or sub-phases for our purposes. The first task was preparation for the river crossing by the Army of the Cumberland and its substantial trains. This task was completed between 20 and 29 August. The second task or sub-phase was the actual crossing operation and subsequent consolidation on the southern bank, and this task was completed between 29 August and 2 September. Upon the conclusion of these phases, Rosecrans would be prepared to conduct the third and decisive phase; the advance on a broad front across the various ridgelines and valleys of the Appalachian Mountains to threaten General Bragg's lines of communications from his source of supply in Atlanta and compel him to withdraw from Chattanooga, the objective point of the campaign. Our consideration of the intelligence available to the general commanding will follow this sequence of tasks, as each period constitutes a distinct phase and the conclusion of each phase required a new decision or represented a decision point for Major General Rosecrans. This sequencing of the operation is consistent with Rosecrans' own view as presented in his after-action report.¹

Preparation for Crossing the Tennessee River, 20 to 28 August 1863

Rosecrans stated in his after-action report that the priority of collection effort during this period was to identify the best points for the crossing and the best available means prepared. He also considered it desirable to "conceal to the last moment the points

of crossing” but realized the bluffs on the south bank of the river made this goal “next to impossible.”²

With virtually the entire Army of the Cumberland now closed up on the Tennessee River the volume of reporting on Confederate dispositions to the immediate front increased. A steady stream of deserters provided generally accurate reporting on the dispositions and strengths of their own units, although information on Confederate intent remained little more than rumor. Rosecrans placed enough faith in these rumors that he did forward several of them to Washington D.C. with insufficient filtering or analysis of credibility.

By 20 August it was confirmed that there were no Confederate forces north of the Tennessee except for “bushwackers” or guerillas. Appropriately low levels of manpower were dedicated to rear area security except to the southwest where the cavalry division of Colonel McCook was enthusiastically chasing rebel conscription parties and bushwackers around the Alabama countryside. The 21 August summary of operations submitted by McCook reports his command conducting picket duty along the lower Tennessee along with the aforementioned counterguerilla actions to the total exclusion of any deep reconnaissance across the river toward Chattanooga.

Colonel Carlton of the 89th Ohio forwarded a particularly useful deserter report to Brigadier General Garfield on 20 August. William Duncan of Company H, Second Tennessee provided accurate order of battle to the brigade level on Cheatham’s division of Polk’s Corps, correctly noting that Jackson’s Brigade was detached and serving with Buckner near Knoxville. Information on thirteen brigades is included in this report, which placed the majority of Bragg’s troops east of Chattanooga arrayed along the

Cleveland-Chattanooga rail line. One division was reported in the vicinity of Ringgold to the south. This force disposition indicated Bragg was orienting his army to the north to respond to any upstream crossing of the Tennessee northeast of the city. Bragg's total strength was placed at 30,000 to 35,000 in the vicinity of Chattanooga, although Breckenridge's division was reportedly en-route from Mississippi with arrival expected during the week.³

Rosecrans had obviously sensitized his commanders to be alert for any indications of enemy withdrawal from Chattanooga as Major General John M. Palmer stated in a report at 1735 20 August "The rumors are numerous, though none look to the 'immediate evacuation of Chattanooga.'" (sub-quote in the original text).⁴

The morning of 21 August Rosecrans remained confident his feint upriver had succeeded and stated in a telegram to Halleck "I think we shall maneuver to cross where they do not expect us."⁵ Several developments later in the day on 21 August would complicate the intelligence picture for Rosecrans and diminish that confidence. It was reported by a walk-in citizen source that a force of 3,000-4,000 rebel cavalry had crossed the Tennessee to the southwest of Rosecrans' cavalry screen and was threatening the rear.⁶ Despite Rosecrans' skepticism regarding this report, he prudently had Captain Thoms immediately contact Colonel McCook on the right flank and follow up on this report. By late on the 22nd this report had been found to be false.⁷

Far more threatening were increasingly frequent rumors that General Joe Johnston was sending significant reinforcements to Bragg, and possibly even taking command of the Army of Tennessee. Sources of this information included "two young men" reporting information gathered from their father, deserters from Anderson's brigade and "an

intelligent Negro" recently in Chattanooga that claimed to have personally seen Johnston. The size of Johnston's force was variously reported as 10,000-25,000.⁸ The probable source of this information was the impending return of forces detached from Bragg's army for service in Mississippi with Johnston. Despite the sketchy nature of these reports Rosecrans included this rumor in his 22 August summary to the War Department, choosing to cite the higher figure of 25,000 when stating how many troops Johnston may have brought. Rosecrans had also concluded that Cleburne's Division might oppose the movement across the river at Bridgeport.⁹ Ironically the only Confederate force opposite the Bridgeport crossing site had withdrawn the night of 21 August. Major General Thomas had delayed reporting this move, which was observed and promptly reported by his subordinates, while awaiting confirmation.¹⁰ Deserters also reported the withdrawal of Anderson's Brigade on 22 August and Lytle sent twenty-five sharpshooters across the Tennessee to confirm its departure.¹¹

Meanwhile to the northeast of Chattanooga Major General Crittenden reported that Colonel Minty had reached the Tennessee River in the vicinity of Blythe's Ferry. There he found two Mississippi regiments "throwing up intrenchments across the river."¹² Crittenden also forwarded a lengthy report from Major General Palmer dated 22 August. Palmer had met a Dr. McGraw who claimed to be in the service of General Thomas. McGraw reported that Forrest had his headquarters at Kingston with his forces scattered throughout the adjoining region. Polk's Corps was reported at Kingston with 15,000 men, and Hill's Corps was near Chattanooga with another 15,000. Buckner was reported at Knoxville and Loudon with "not more than 5,000 men." McGraw reported that Bragg had arrayed his troops thus to threaten the rear of the Union army "under the

belief that our whole force would advance by way of Bridgeport.” McGraw also repeated earlier reports of Confederate concern for Rome, elaborating that they believed there was an additional force advancing from the vicinity of Huntsville.¹³ McGraw’s reporting was very good. Bragg had indeed positioned his forces east of Chattanooga, although not as far north as the source indicated. Returns of 20 August placed Polk’s effective total strength at 14,654 and Hill’s at 13,372.¹⁴ Buckner’s strength at this time is reported as “about 5,000 infantry and artillery” in General Bragg’s after-action report.¹⁵

The consistency of these reports regarding Confederate dispositions may have led Rosecrans to conclude his diversion to the northeast of Chattanooga was successful, yet McGraw’s report that the Confederates knew the main force would cross via Bridgeport should have been cause for concern. There was additional reporting which indicated the Confederates fully expected his main effort to the southwest. Wilder reported on 22 August, “Prisoners say it is well understood that this is only a feint, and that the real point of attack is down the river.”¹⁶ Rosecrans appears to have accounted for this reporting in his estimate of the situation when he relayed his plan for the campaign to General Burnside on 22 August stated it was his “Wish to cross below (Chattanooga), if not hindered; may try it above, if enemy move to suit.”¹⁷ In the modern language of war Rosecrans was “force oriented” versus “terrain oriented,” and still displayed a flexibility, which would permit him to move, based on his intelligence.

Another interesting piece of information was reported during this period and demonstrates how lack of attention to detail can disrupt the analytical process. Wilder reported on 21 August “Citizens and prisoners all think that Bragg’s intention is to go into Kentucky by way of Kingston.”¹⁸ There was no tactical reporting of enemy

movements or additional source reports to correlate with this single unlikely report. The morning of 22 August a far more plausible report was forwarded to Garfield by Crittenden: "The universal opinion is that had you not moved, Bragg would have advanced to Kentucky via Kingston with 20,000 men and his cavalry."¹⁹ Nonetheless Rosecrans chose to forward the more alarming "Citizens and prisoners. . . say Bragg will go to Kentucky by Kingston" in his report to Washington sent at 2300 22 August.²⁰ The text of Rosecrans' message indicates a verbatim excerpting from Wilder's report. The disturbing implication of the failure to integrate Crittenden's more credible version is that either Rosecrans was allowing himself to be overly influenced by specific sources of information to the exclusion of others or that Garfield was not sharing all reporting with Rosecrans. Yet another possibility is that already the volume of intelligence reporting was overwhelming the information management mechanisms of the Army of the Cumberland.

A pointed exchange of telegrams between Rosecrans and Halleck on 22 August surely diverted the general commanding from full focus on his campaign. Rosecrans responded to a letter from Halleck in extremely strong language, stating, "The contempt for our opinions, apparent from the War Department, arises from a want of knowledge of the circumstances." Rosecrans went on to provide an outstanding tutorial on the realities of operations in the barrens of Tennessee. He concluded by once again reminding Halleck of the "contemptuous silence with which our success (at Tullahoma) was treated, has produced a feeling that the Secretary is unjust." The origin of this whole exchange was Rosecrans' continued requests for additional mounted troops--a topic that was strikingly relevant to the developing campaign around Chattanooga.

The level of interest shown by Rosecrans in intelligence reporting despite the ongoing correspondence with Washington is demonstrated in a message released at 1645 on 22 August. Rosecrans cites a same-day report from General Sheridan regarding the withdrawal of Anderson's Brigade from opposite Bridgeport in this message to Major General Thomas and seeks confirmation and elaboration.²¹

Efforts to identify suitable crossing locations continued throughout this period. Topographical engineers moved forward and prepared exquisitely detailed sketches of known ferries and sought fords. Major General Palmer reported that "Loyal inhabitants doubt the river can be forded anywhere" although Colonel Wilder reported a ford near Friar's Island at the mouth of the Chickamauga. Even at that location the river was reported as "about 4½ feet deep and rapid."²²

Wilder's brigade provided ample information regarding Confederate activity in Chattanooga itself. Detailed reports of the Confederate fortifications and actions in the city were forwarded several times daily. A key indicator of Bragg's intent to cede Chattanooga was reported on 22 August when alert observers noted two locomotives under steam pulling eight other locomotives with cold boilers away from the city. Wilder and Brigadier General Wagner immediately seized upon this indication the enemy was moving inoperable locomotives away from the city as a possible preparation for withdrawal.²³ There is no documentation of this move in the Confederate official reports, although on 21 August General Buckner's Chief of Staff notified the President of the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad in Knoxville that: "An evacuation of this point being if not a probable at least a possible event, the major general commanding directs me to state to you that it would be well to hold the rollingstock of your road in readiness to be moved

in case of imminent danger.”²⁴ It is probable that the President of the East Tennessee and Virginia would have shared this information with his counterparts from the East Tennessee and Georgia Railroad operating out of Chattanooga, possibly resulting in the move detected by Wilder. Observation of the Confederates at Chattanooga continued with great emphasis, Wagner reporting that “Several glasses are watching them all the time, and I will report to you all we learn.”²⁵

No significant rebel movements were reported on 23 August, and reporting continued to indicate the enemy expected the Federal advance upriver from Chattanooga. Rosecrans reported to Halleck that the “rebels hold the fords and ferries from Washington down to Shellmound, which we seized last night.”²⁶ Unfortunately Major General Reynolds had his troops destroy the Shellmound bridge during a reconnaissance mission to the southern bank--an action that earned him a mild rebuke from Major General Thomas.²⁷ Late on the 23rd Rosecrans forwarded to Halleck the report from Colonel Wilder regarding the movement of locomotives away from Chattanooga, stating that Wilder “Thinks they are evacuating Chattanooga. I think they are a little confused.”²⁸

Shortages of mounted troops and mismanagement of the available cavalry continued to plague the Army of the Cumberland. Major General Reynolds appealed for additional mounted troops for use as couriers as his organic orderly assets were exhausted from courier duty.²⁹ Major General Crittenden’s extreme concern for his left flank (the left-most flank of the army) caused him to pull Minty’s cavalry in tight on his left and limit its ability to conduct reconnaissance.³⁰ Cavalry on the right flank of the army was dedicated to picketing the river on a broad frontage while yet another battalion was

diverted from supporting the army's main effort toward Chattanooga to chase guerillas near Cowan (along the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad).³¹

Rosecrans continued to devote personal attention to intelligence matters. Brigadier General Garfield relayed an explicit directive from the general commanding to the corps commanders to submit detailed listings of all deserters with special care to their regiments and organizations "that we may ascertain if any new troops have been sent to Bragg."³² Unfortunately the official record does not include the reports this message solicited from the corps. This message is significant as it reveals Rosecrans' continuing personal involvement in estimating enemy order of battle and also shows the influence of the continued rumors regarding imminent reinforcement from Johnston. Rosecrans also devoted personal attention to an operations security issue when he sent a telegram to Brigadier General Granger in Nashville regarding a newspaper dispatch submitted "for transmission over wires" which included "important information of location and destination of my troops."³³ Rosecrans directed adherence to proper procedures by correspondents.

Rosecrans could take heart from reports such as those of Brigadier General Hazen reporting a "conscript says they are expecting an attack above (Chattanooga)" and continued reporting by Colonel Wilder and others of heavy Confederate concentration at fords at Chattanooga and upriver to Blythe's Ferry (some 30 miles northeast).³⁴ Almost lost in the volume of correspondence describing rebel concentration to the northeast and preparations for the evacuation of Chattanooga is an extremely important report from Brigadier General Thomas J. Wood to Garfield. Wood wrote ominously "I now think the enemy is of the opinion that an attack is not to be made in this direction with a large

force,” (directly across the Tennessee River in the Chattanooga vicinity) “and have consequently left at Chattanooga, and at each of the crossings, only sufficient force to man the works and guard the crossings against a small force. The main force is no doubt below somewhere.”³⁵ The beginning of Rosecrans’ willful disbelief of intelligence reporting contrary to his preconceptions to this date can be traced. The vast majority of information received up until this date supported his concept of the campaign. Almost exclusive reliance on deserter reports and a complete lack of deep reconnaissance by the limited cavalry available would greatly handicap the Union intelligence effort during the crossing and subsequent movement.

The 24th of August was a relatively quiet day along the Tennessee. Preparations for the river crossing continued, and reporting continued to be received indicating rebel preparations for the evacuation of Chattanooga. Colonel Wilder reported that “Last night 13 trains of cars came into town apparently empty, and five went out loaded, at least the noise made by them indicated such to be the case.” This observation was supported by “Negroes, who swam the river yesterday morning, report that the rebels removed the machinery from the rolling mill the night before.” Forrest was reported to be near Blythe’s Ferry with 5,000 men, a report accurate both in numbers and location.³⁶

A source referred to as “M. D. M. of Waldron’s Ridge” reported that two brigades were located in Lookout Valley and there were strong works at the point of Lookout Mountain. Additionally M. D. M. opined that: “Should they be attacked from Knoxville and vicinity Rome the belief is they will fall back to Dalton. Rolling stock and commissary stores are being removed.”³⁷

A quartermaster sergeant deserter provided valuable reporting when he stated the ration returns for Bragg's army totaled 40,000. The sergeant also stated there were only 20,000 men present for duty--an inconsistency that Brigadier General Wood questioned when he forwarded the report to Garfield. The sergeant went on to state "moreover, that our movement took the rebels completely by surprise."³⁸

Despite the good news in these reports, Rosecrans appears to have placed some credence in previous reporting of General Johnston's imminent reinforcement of Bragg when he inquired of Halleck "Would like to know if Grant is doing anything to occupy Johnston's attention."³⁹ Halleck's prompt reply on 25 August could not have been very encouraging: "Grant's movements at present have no connection with yours."⁴⁰

The confident tone of reporting continued on 25 August. Wilder reported Polk's Corps to the rear of Chattanooga near the base of Lookout Mountain with Hill's Corps deployed upriver as far as Loudon guarding the river. Available information continued to indicate the enemy was preparing to evacuate Chattanooga, "taking away south everything of the least value--even taking down the church bells." Wilder also provided his analysis of the situation, stating "I think they will try to defend the line of the river above here, making Lookout Mountain their line on the left, *being prepared at the same time to run if outflanked*" (emphasis added). Wilder provided no basis for this final observation.⁴¹

On the left Crittenden submitted similarly encouraging reports, citing a guide named W. T. Shelton reporting the enemy was removing his commissary stores from Chattanooga to Atlanta, driving cattle, horses, and hogs out of the country; cutting down the growing corn; conscription still going on.⁴²

The news was even better from the right flank on the 25 August. Colonel McCook reported from Larkinsville Alabama, "Refugees and deserters from the rebel army are coming in daily at our various stations. The deserters unite in reporting that Bragg's army is very much demoralized, desertions occurring and increasing daily."⁴³ A comment on the nature of deserter reporting is appropriate at this time. The vast majority of reports arriving at Rosecrans' headquarters were just that--deserter debriefings. Desertion is an essentially cowardly act, and one which encourages embellishment of the hopelessness of the army's situation by the deserter simply to save face. Braxton Bragg's army was indeed in poor spirits at this time. The soldiers could see the preparations for the abandonment of Chattanooga, and Tennessee soldiers understood this was the last Confederate stronghold in their home state. Combine these facts with the poor living conditions of a Southern army in the field and it was merely slight exaggeration to describe the force as demoralized. There is no indication in the record that Union officers considered this fact in evaluating deserter reports.

The upbeat tone of reporting continued on the 26 August. Brigadier General Hazen forwarded a prisoner debriefing indicating "the enemy opposed to us are all moving to Atlanta." While Colonel McCook submitted a deserter report stating, "He also reports the army in and around Chattanooga as being in a demoralized condition, and both officers and men asserting that they will not follow General Bragg any further as they regard their case as hopeless." This happy news overshadowed a more significant report that Bragg was forming a new defense with his right in Knoxville and the left of his line at Rome, Georgia. Wheeler's cavalry was also reported (accurately) in the Rome area.⁴⁴ Although the technical accuracy of this report is flawed, the important aspect is

the reported reorientation of Bragg's defenses from a northerly direction to a westerly oriented line. The location of Wheeler's cavalry to the south while Forrest's was firmly located to the north near Kingston should have indicated the flanks of Bragg's army. Another report that was inconsistent with the rumored impending withdrawal of Bragg came from Colonel John J. Funkhouser to Wilder at 1900 on 25 August. "It is reported by citizens that loud and continued cheering was heard on the arrival of the cars last evening, supposed to be reinforcements coming up." Wilder apparently dismissed this report and there was no followup at any level. Wilder did at least forward the report without comment to Colonel Goddard at army headquarters appended to his own report which stated "A few trains have arrived empty and gone out apparently loaded."⁴⁵

Brigadier General Van Cleve summarized the prevailing mood in the army in a dispatch to Lieutenant Colonel Lynn Starling at XXI Army Corps: "All in good spirits, trusting that we are rapidly crushing this rebellion."⁴⁶

Despite the troubling lack of information on Confederate intent Rosecrans continued to demonstrate personal involvement in intelligence matters of a low level when he had Garfield send a dispatch to Major General Reynolds stating that the general commanding personally recommended a certain ferry man be arrested and sent away or "watched carefully" based on reporting from Unionist citizens.⁴⁷

As the army continued preparations to cross the Tennessee River on 27 August the volume of deserter reporting rose to a crescendo. The majority of deserters reported their units in poor morale with frequent desertions. Yet interspersed with these commentaries were nuggets of tactical intelligence providing locations of some formations and details on fortifications under construction at Lookout Mountain and near

various railroad junctions. Perhaps prompted by Garfield, Crittenden responded, "Certainly the rumors are numerous, yet none look to the immediate evacuation of Chattanooga."⁴⁸

Wood submitted a report on 27 August which described Tennessee troops as in understandably "bad spirits," but stated Georgia and Mississippi troops were in good spirits as they were "getting nearer home." An additional indicator of intent to evacuate Chattanooga surfaced with the reported transfer of prisoners to Atlanta and the persistent rumor of imminent reinforcement by Johnston was repeated.⁴⁹

Reconnaissance operations along the river continued, with a probable ford identified near Hart's Bar (vicinity of Stevenson).⁵⁰ Meanwhile guerilla destruction of three bridges between Huntsville, Alabama and the Tennessee River highlighted the very real threat to the Union rear area.⁵¹ The debriefing of a Confederate soldier provided a grim reminder of the high-stakes intelligence game underway in Tennessee; "I belonged to the provost guard in Tullahoma when a Union spy named McKinney was hung. McKinney refused to say anything when taken out to be executed."⁵²

Difficulties communicating between the elements of the Army of the Cumberland along such a broad frontage began to surface at this time. When chided for a lack of timely communication Major General Granger complained to Garfield that telegrams were taking over six hours between headquarters and Nashville. Orders were also issued from army headquarters to Major General Stanley for the dedication of still more of the precious cavalry of the command to courier duty, further limiting the command's underutilized potential reconnaissance capability.⁵³

By 28 August Rosecrans was ready to move again. He notified General Halleck that "The cavalry will begin to cross tonight."⁵⁴ Reporting continued to support the belief that the Confederates were preparing to evacuate Chattanooga and stripping the city of machinery. A report that should have raised concerns came from the local rebel newspaper, *The Chattanooga Rebel*. According to Confederate prisoners captured by Wilder's command the 27 August edition reported "20,000 Federals had crossed the river at Bridgeport and that their (rebel) forces had fallen back to the mountains, where they will dispute our passage." The prisoners themselves doubted the newspaper account and were "confident Bragg will retreat to Atlanta."⁵⁵

From his position opposite Chattanooga Wagner disputed Hazen's claim the rebels were retreating to Atlanta and reported ". . . there are as many in sight from the lookout as ever." Wagner went on: "There seems to be an increase of force on the railroad out in the direction of Dalton and Cleveland both, as well as up the river." "The enemy seem to fear our crossing the river above the city, and are guarding and fortifying all the crossings."⁵⁶

On the eve of crossing the Tennessee Rosecrans stuck with his original plan. He had accurate information on enemy disposition and was reasonably confident his deception had succeeded in focusing the enemy's attention upriver from Chattanooga. His crossing sites had been thoroughly reconnoitered and would be virtually unopposed downriver in the Bridgeport and Stevenson areas. The flanking movement to the west of Bragg would probably succeed in dislocating the Confederates and they were clearly preparing to yield Chattanooga without a siege. Rosecrans had failed, however, to plan adequate intelligence operations to support this next phase of his campaign. Cavalry

remained focused on the close battle, conducting picket operations along the river, committed to counter-guerrilla operations in the rear, and crossing the river in immediate advance of the infantry. No deep reconnaissance operations were underway to locate the mass of Bragg's army reported south of Chattanooga and no record exists of dedicated scout or spy missions launched in advance of the operation. The signals stations were up and reporting, although the constricted nature of the terrain limited their effectiveness. Communications between the widely dispersed corps of the army were already strained even when operating from static positions on the relatively open ground fronting the Tennessee River. Finally there was a pervasive atmosphere of imminent victory among the commanders, an atmosphere that was causing serious errors of analysis in considering the available information. As the lead cavalymen splashed across the Tennessee River the early morning of 29 August the Army of the Cumberland was heading into the mountains blind

Over the River, 29 August to 2 September 1863

As crossing operations commenced at Caperton's Ferry via pontoon bridge, cavalry forded the Tennessee at Bridgeport, Brannan's advance party crossed via makeshift rafts and boats at Battle Creek and crossings occurred at Shellmound as well. Reporting continued to indicate minimal rebel presence along the river west of Chattanooga. Brannan reported that a citizen named E. H. Packard indicated there was but one company located west of Running Water Creek and confirmed earlier reports the bridge over the creek had been destroyed some days prior. Most significantly Packard reported "Bragg's lines are between Chattanooga and Lookout Mountain."⁵⁷ Thomas forwarded this report to Rosecrans while coordinating details of the crossing.

Overlooked in the exchange of operational data is the implication that Bragg was orienting his force toward the west at this time. As the day progressed reporting from Colonel Wilder dated 28 August arrived at General Thomas' headquarters stating, "At Chattanooga. . . everything indicates a settled purpose to retreat and a disposition to take everything that can be moved of any value." Wilder went on to confirm citizen Packard's report that Bragg's line of defense was anchored on Lookout Mountain to the west with only pickets and scouts west of the mountain.⁵⁸ Brigadier General Wagner's report for the day of the 29th cited citizens and deserters indicating the rebels were continuing to move forces upriver from Chattanooga although "There is still a large camp in the rear of city (Chattanooga), but does not seem as large as heretofore."⁵⁹

Brigadier General Hazen submitted a valuable debriefing of a knowledgeable Confederate private who had deserted from a hospital in the vicinity of Tunnel Hill, Georgia. This soldier reported "Bragg has been trying all this time to get reenforcements from Johnston, but can get none." The private went on to state that "no one over the river expects the army to fight this side of Atlanta." and that a brigade of Mississippi troops previously sent to Atlanta for guard duty had returned to the army but no other reinforcements had arrived recently. This individual's information was accurate (indeed it would be another week before Johnston would dispatch even limited reinforcements to Bragg), although the soldier-level rumor regarding no intent to fight north of Atlanta is just that, the perception of a discouraged rank and file tired of retreating in the face of the foe. A hasty and basic analysis of this report would dismiss the information on enemy intent as pure rumor and an extremely unlikely course of action from a political and strategic perspective.⁶⁰

Major General Phil Sheridan submitted a report to Garfield at 1600 from Jasper relaying that his cavalry had scouted several miles ahead of his crossing site and were reporting the evacuation of Chattanooga. This report was premature and probably reflected loyal citizen information based on the ongoing removal of stores and machinery from the city.⁶¹

The shortage of signals personnel continued to affect operations at this point, even prior to the corps moving into the mountains on widely separated routes. Major General Alexander McCook appealed to Garfield for the return of his signal officers to support his operations. Garfield promptly replied, denying the request although he did state that Captain Merrill, chief of the signal corps, would provide two officers as temporary augmentation during the crossing operation.⁶²

General Rosecrans summarized the day's events in his update to General Halleck at the close of the day. No mention was made of enemy activity; Rosecrans simply stated "No fighting to amount to anything." The vulnerable crossing operation was off to a good start, and the enemy appeared to still be focused on the possibility of the Union army crossing upriver from Chattanooga as per the deception plan.⁶³

Crossing operations continued throughout the 30th and the flow of information regarding Confederate activity remained minimal. Wilder reported all quiet in Chattanooga leading him to conclude that all materiel of value had been removed from the city.⁶⁴ Cavalry operations to locate the enemy force continued to falter, particularly on the far right flank. Major General Stanley's Cavalry Corps identified a fording site in the vicinity of Bellefonte, Alabama while several brigades of cavalry appear to have been engaged in foraging operations on the north side of the river, widely dispersed and

seemingly unprepared for the advance of the army. Despite the immediate need for cavalry to aggressively reconnoiter to the front of the army and locate Bragg's army, Colonel McCook and General Stanley passed the day identifying a fording site and McCook reported to Army of the Cumberland Headquarters at 2300 "Nothing of interest on my lines to-day."⁶⁵ Thomas' XIV Corps reported an intent to dispatch reconnaissance toward Trenton early on 31 August. Later in the day this force was redirected toward Chattanooga.⁶⁶ Reconnaissance and rear area security continued to compete for the limited cavalry assets available. Major General Granger commanding the Reserve Corps not only refused to transfer cavalry forward but demanded additional cavalry regiments to secure the lines of communication to the rear.⁶⁷

Along the center of the army Sheridan forwarded a report from Brigadier General Lytle to Garfield. Lytle relayed information gathered from a contraband (escaped slave) indicating the enemy had loaded wagons in preparation for abandoning Trenton.

Brigadier General Wood submitted a report to Garfield discussing the continuing reporting of enemy movement upriver from Chattanooga. Wood added that deserters reported it was Bragg's intention to overwhelm Burnside, but Wood felt he was unable to comment on the feasibility of this report.⁶⁸ Confederate correspondence indicates Bragg was not considering any such move at this time.

Despite the meager reporting and growing ambiguity regarding General Bragg's army, both Rosecrans and Garfield authored telegrams on 30 August that provide insight into their perception of the enemy. Garfield relayed instructions to Crittenden to move down the Sequatchie Valley and cross to the south bank of the Tennessee via Bridgeport, Shellmound or Battle Creek. The brigades of Hazen and Wagner were to be left behind

along with Wilder's and Minty's brigades to maintain the illusion of Federal readiness to cross in the north. Wagner and Hazen were to remain prepared to cross the river and occupy Chattanooga should the Confederates retreat. Garfield went on to say "The present indications are that Bragg will fall back from Chattanooga, and if we bring him to battle at all it will be between Dalton and Atlanta."⁶⁹

A telegram from Major General Rosecrans to Major General Burnside reveals his estimate of the situation: "We are crossing at Bridgeport; shall flank the enemy's position at Chattanooga and even at Dalton, if not south, depending on his movements. Our present indications are that he will retreat toward Atlanta."⁷⁰

Neither officer cited specific sources for their conclusions. Both had convinced themselves that the enemy would retreat at this point, and they *believed* the reporting substantiated this estimate. Our detailed examination of the intelligence reporting available to the commander up to this point does not support his estimate of the enemy situation. Indeed, the limited reporting available indicated the enemy was moving forces forward to the perceived threat axis northeast of Chattanooga prepared to offer battle. The intelligence available does support the conclusion that Rosecrans' deception operation had succeeded and he would probably flank Bragg's army, compelling the latter to yield Chattanooga. Bragg had prepared for this eventuality by stripping the city of everything of value and indeed was no longer anchored to the city. He was now free to maneuver his army in battle, increasing the threat to the Army of the Cumberland. These analytical conclusions escaped both Rosecrans and Garfield. From this point forward there would be an additional hurdle to their achievement of full understanding of the enemy situation; both of these senior officers had *convinced themselves* the enemy

would withdraw far to the south. They reached this conclusion by a combination of optimistic interpretation of dubious reporting which was little more than soldier rumor or scuttlebutt, and a failure to conduct aggressive reconnaissance operations to locate and monitor the enemy force. Subsequent operations by the Union forces and the "pursuit mentality" which infected the senior officers of the army must be considered in this light.

Having reached the conclusions discussed above on 30 August Rosecrans was faced with numerous conflicting reports on 31 August. While crossing operations continued across the frontage of the army the officers of the headquarters busied themselves with innumerable logistical details. Railroad coordination, movement of provisions, delays in the movement of pontoons and the provision of planking to bridge sites were among the concerns addressed in correspondence from the headquarters. Brigadier General Garfield, Colonel Goddard, Major Bond, and Captain Thoms were all intimately involved in these logistical details, relaying instructions from Major General Rosecrans, leading one to wonder who was thinking operationally and concentrating on the foe.

Early in the day Garfield inquired of Crittenden, "The general wants to know what news there is from your front and particularly whether the enemy is moving up the river." As this information was of interest to Rosecrans himself it confirms that Rosecrans was closely monitoring intelligence reporting and seeking greater refinement of the previous day's report of Confederate concentration northeast of Chattanooga. Crittenden promptly relayed information regarding Confederate strength along the river. Colonel Minty reported there were now five enemy brigades near Blythe's Ferry which represented a substantial increase. Despite the development of a possible threat to the left

flank of the army Crittenden's instructions to move southwest and cross over the Tennessee River west of Chattanooga remained in effect. Crittenden commenced his move 31 August and was to arrive in Jasper by 1100 on the 1st of September.⁷¹

Rosecrans interpreted the enemy movement upriver from Chattanooga as an indication the rebels expected him to cross in that location and reported this interpretation to Halleck in a telegram at 1000. He went on to estimate the "rebels will probably evacuate Chattanooga on hearing we are crossing, and take the line of the Georgia railroad from Ringgold south."⁷²

Thomas forwarded a report from a well-placed source that should have given Rosecrans and Garfield pause. Several slaves belonging to Robert Tatem, a member of the Georgia Legislature living in Trenton, reported that substantial reinforcements (30,000 men) had arrived from General Johnston in Mississippi. These troops were reportedly en-route to Loudon (approximately seventy miles northeast of Chattanooga). A rebel cavalry force of 4,000 men had departed Trenton bound for Rome, Georgia on 29 August and Union cavalry had arrived in Trenton on 30 August. The contrabands also reported that Tatem was "very sanguine of a rebel victory at Chattanooga; offered to bet all he had on it. All expect a battle there."⁷³ Thomas forwarded this report to Garfield without comment.

Colonel Wilder submitted another of his highly informative reports on 31 August. A Mr. William Crutchfield of Chattanooga reported Knoxville had fallen to Burnside. Buckner had withdrawn to Loudon, Forrest was at Kingston, and part of Hill's Corps was en-route to reinforce Forrest. Mr. Crutchfield reported a rumor that Johnston was to send 15,000 men to reinforce Bragg, but "those who ought to know informed him that

Johnston could not furnish more than 10,000 men.” In addition to Mr. Crutchfield’s largely accurate report Wilder reported that he had recovered three scouts of the Seventeenth Indiana who had spent two nights reconnoitering as far as Raccoon Mountain (seven miles south of the river). These men had discovered “no camps west of Lookout Mountain, except about one regiment in the Lookout Valley, who appear to be on picket. One or two companies of mounted men scout down toward Bridgeport each day.”⁷⁴

The final significant piece of information reported on 31 August came from Brigadier General Wagner. Wagner reported dense smoke was seen on 30 August near Ringgold along the Atlanta railroad, “There is, no doubt, a camp there. Has not been there before.” Wagner also forwarded a prisoner whom he suspected was an officer concealing his identity. The prisoner related that the only fear the Confederates had was that the Union forces “will cross the river below and cut the railroad; in that event, compelling Bragg to retreat again as at Tullahoma.”⁷⁵

While the left wing of the army sought to clarify the contradictory and threatening reports, the farcical efforts of the cavalry corps continued on the right. No significant forces crossed the Tennessee and a general malaise continued to characterize the actions of Stanley’s force. No reporting of any sort was generated by the cavalry on 31 August.

By the end of the day the reporting painted a reasonably clear picture of the Confederate situation. Bragg had placed cavalry at the extreme flanks of his army, Forrest to the north at Kingston and Wheeler to the south near Rome. Buckner’s corps had pulled back across the Tennessee from Knoxville and was now within supporting distance. Other forces had moved to the northeast of Chattanooga in probable

anticipation of the expected Union attempt to cross the Tennessee in that area. Bragg expected reinforcements from Johnston--anywhere from ten to thirty thousand, although ten to fifteen thousand seemed most likely. A force was also consolidating in the Ringgold area while there were defensive positions at Lookout Mountain. This information combined with previous reports of possible enemy offensive action upriver from Chattanooga caused Rosecrans to increase vigilance along the river in that area and report to Halleck at 2300 the night of 31 August, "Information of the enemy's movements conflicting--something to indicate they are moving up the river. Their cavalry left Trenton and went toward Rome." The conflict in the information is quite clear in retrospect. The enemy was not preparing to move up the river, he was consolidating his forces and awaiting development of the situation.⁷⁶

On 1 September it was an extremely quiet day for intelligence activity. Ongoing crossing operations absorbed most of the attention of the staff and commanders. Garfield did query Thomas for further information on the "reported movement of the enemy into East Tennessee" and Thomas promptly replied he had no further information. Garfield also prompted Crittenden for an update and was informed the five previously reported brigades remained in place on the southern bank near Blythe's Ferry. During the afternoon Major General Crittenden reminded Garfield that Van Cleve's division would be withdrawing from its positions along the river in accordance with previously issued orders unless countermanded. The orders were allowed to stand and any pretense of deception upriver from Chattanooga came to an end.⁷⁷ The silence of the cavalry corps continued unabated on 1 September; there is not a single entry in the official record concerning Stanley's corps on that date. By the end of the day when Rosecrans drafted

his update to General Halleck he could only state, "Nothing more definite from the enemy."⁷⁸

On 2 September the Army of the Cumberland's crossing operation moved into high gear and large numbers of troops crossed to the southern bank. Crowding in assembly areas in the restricted ground of the southern bank became a problem as Thomas' XIV Corps was shifted right to make room for Crittenden's XXI Corps. Adding to the confusion, the makeshift bridge constructed by Sheridan at Bridgeport collapsed after approximately six hours in operation. Sheridan's division had crossed, but trains and other units remained on the north bank. Rosecrans himself went down to the crossing site to observe the operation and met with Sheridan.

Stanley's cavalry continued to move sluggishly on the right flank of the army. Colonel McCook's First Division reported his command finally prepared to cross the river at Caperton's Ferry, yet the division remained encamped near Stevenson at the end of the day and McCook issued orders for the division to cross "to-morrow at daylight."⁷⁹ Brigadier General Crook's Second Division fared just as poorly and had its crossing delayed by the collapse of the Bridgeport bridge. Garfield informed Crook that Major General Stanley was in receipt of orders for his movements the following day, and the Second Division also remained encamped on the north bank as the day ended.⁸⁰

While the main body of the army crowded across the river and bickered over staging areas, important intelligence arrived from the left flank. Colonel Wilder reported large clouds of dust in the vicinity of Ringgold and Tyner's Station on 1 September in a dispatch addressed to Lieutenant Colonel Goddard of Rosecrans' staff. "At sunset there was no abatement of the dust, and at the night ascending smoke gave evidence of the

encampment of troops in that vicinity.” Wilder forwarded a 2 September report from Colonel Funkhouser that elaborated at length on the situation along the river and is worthy of full citation:

Colonel: I have reliable information up as far as Colonel Minty’s. Everything seems to indicate that the enemy are active and stirring. There seems to be no attempt at anything like crossing. All along the line last night was a continual bustle and stir; troops moving all night. Wagons could be heard passing all the ferries; could get no reliable information as to which way the wagons were moving. Captain Flood, at Harrison, thought the movement was in the direction of Chattanooga. All the indications seem to confirm the movement to be in that direction. They showed a much stronger front yesterday than at any time for several days. This may be accounted for in this way. It is evident to me from all the information that I can get that they are bringing the forces from up about Kingston and this side. The raid the enemy was expected to make on yesterday did not take place. All my officers in charge of picket posts make the report that continued chopping or pounding could be heard all last night, as if they were repairing wagons, making boats or some such thing. I will continue to report any and all information that I deem at all needful or interesting to you.⁸¹

Colonel Minty provided further details on the enemy’s movement toward Chattanooga in another dispatch addressed to Goddard. Minty reported that Burnside’s forces had arrived at Kingston, Forrest had fallen back across the Tennessee, the Confederates had burned a large collection of boats and barges collected at Loudon and relayed a prisoner report that Buckner’s command had crossed the Tennessee River at Loudon and “are now being pushed forward as fast as possible toward Chattanooga.”⁸²

Brigadier General Wood submitted an important debriefing report addressed to Garfield from his headquarters at Jasper. A Captain Henry Baker of the Third Confederate Cavalry, taken prisoner on 28 August, revealed, “If the position at Chattanooga is flanked the Confederate army will not risk a battle there.” However, “It is believed in Bragg’s army that the fate of the Confederacy hangs upon the issue of a battle that must be made somewhere with the army of General Rosecrans. Bragg will be

compelled to fight his army within two months or lose it to desertion.” This piece of information was very valuable, but Wood went on to conduct a piece of amateur analysis which greatly diluted the value of the report. In an endorsement of his own debriefing report he deduced that the Confederates were preparing to move against Burnside’s army, stating that this deduction “corroborates the information I have been received for several days past from entirely different and independent sources (my own spies and scouts), and explains facts and movements reported by General Wagner, but which are unintelligible without this key.”⁸³ In his own endorsement of this report Major General Crittenden enthusiastically reported that a Confederate move on Burnside “is the very thing we should desire. If Bragg should make a dash at Burnside and Burnside retire slowly, declining to fight, I think we can destroy his (Bragg’s) army.”⁸⁴ For his part Burnside relayed to Rosecrans that “Citizens say that all the forces of East Tennessee have moved south of Loudon.”⁸⁵

The skeletal outline of the Confederate course of action is revealed in the reporting of 2 September, and it is only a lack of disciplined analysis that prevented Rosecrans from perceiving it. The destruction of boats and crossing means at Loudon clearly indicated no Confederate intent to cross the river and attack upriver from Chattanooga. The concentration of Confederate forces along the Tennessee north of Chattanooga which so mystified the Federal forces and resulted in concern for Burnside’s army was a direct result of Rosecrans’ own deception effort. Bragg had reacted as hoped, focusing his effort upriver from the city. The subsequent movement of Confederate forces back to the Ringgold-Tyner’s Station area, rapid withdrawal of Buckner’s and Forrest’s corps to the Chattanooga vicinity and the withdrawal of Wheeler’s cavalry from

the Trenton area to the vicinity of Rome clearly reveal a Confederate army concentrating for battle and conducting a left wheel to reorient toward the threat from the west.

Repeated prisoner debriefings and source reports indicated Bragg understood the Chattanooga position to be untenable if turned from the west and southwest and he had evacuated the industrial potential of the city. The critical element of information which Rosecrans and his generals failed to account for in their consideration of the enemy was the repeated reporting of the great importance of the Chattanooga position. While Bragg might be compelled to yield the city itself, he was clearly compelled by political and morale considerations to give battle in the area. The indications of the impending southern riposte were in place, but Rosecrans and his staff failed to see them. On the evening of 2 September, as Rosecrans sat down to draft orders to his commanders for the turning movement that would seize Chattanooga for the Union, he had completely misread the enemy situation.

¹OR, Vol. 30, Part I, 51-54.

²OR, Vol. 30, Part I, 51.

³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 88.

⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 90.

⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 99.

⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 105.

⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 126.

⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 102-103, Wilder's debrief of Negro, 123.

⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 110.

- ¹⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 113.
- ¹¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 115-116
- ¹²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 117.
- ¹³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 121.
- ¹⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part IV, 518.
- ¹⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part II, 26.
- ¹⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 124.
- ¹⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 127.
- ¹⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 101.
- ¹⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 118.
- ²⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 111.
- ²¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 113.
- ²²OR, Vol. 30, Part III. Palmer at 121, Wilder at 123.
- ²³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 119-120
- ²⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part IV, 528.
- ²⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 120.
- ²⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 131.
- ²⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 133.
- ²⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 131.
- ²⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 133.
- ³⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 139-140
- ³¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 142.

³²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 136.

³³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 141.

³⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 138 (Hazen) and 136 (Wilder).

³⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 138-139

³⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 151.

³⁷ Summaries of the News reaching Headquarters of General W. S. Rosecrans, 1863-1864, RG 393, part 1, entry 986, National Archives, Washington DC, 24 August Entry.

³⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 154.

³⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 147.

⁴⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 162.

⁴¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 164.

⁴²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 164.

⁴³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 168.

⁴⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 176 (Hazen) and 179 (McCook).

⁴⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 177.

⁴⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 178.

⁴⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 173.

⁴⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 187.

⁴⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 188.

⁵⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 193.

⁵¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 194.

⁵²Summaries of the News reaching Headquarters of General W. S. Rosecrans, 1863-1864, RG 393, part 1, entry 986, National Archives, Washington D.C., 27 August Entry.

⁵³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 192-3

⁵⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 199.

⁵⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 201-202

⁵⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 204.

⁵⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 214.

⁵⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 217.

⁵⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 220-221

⁶⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 221.

⁶¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 220.

⁶²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 219.

⁶³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 213.

⁶⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 234.

⁶⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 241.

⁶⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 233.

⁶⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 238.

⁶⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 237.

⁶⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 236.

⁷⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 242.

⁷¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 256-7

⁷²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 244.

⁷³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 250.

⁷⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 251-2

⁷⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 257.

⁷⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 244.

⁷⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, Garfield/Thomas exchange, 281, Crittenden to Garfield
286-287

⁷⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 279.

⁷⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 315.

⁸⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 315.

⁸¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 301.

⁸²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 316.

⁸³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 306.

⁸⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 305.

⁸⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 297.

CHAPTER 7
OVER THE MOUNTAINS
3 SEPTEMBER--8 SEPTEMBER 1863

The Plan--3 September

Rosecrans and his staff worked late into the night of 2 September, and the written orders which were issued over Brigadier General Garfield's signature bore the time of 0230 3 September. The decisive phase of the massive turning movement had been reached, and Rosecrans now ordered the advance which would dislocate General Bragg from Chattanooga by rendering his northern position in the city untenable due to threats to his tenuous lines of rail communication. From right to left, or south to north across the army's frontage the following tasks were assigned:

Cavalry Corps (Stanley)--Push forward from Bridgeport and Caperton's Ferry to Rawlingsville, Alabama. "General Stanley will send such force from Rawlingsville as he may deem sufficient for the purpose to Rome, Georgia, or as far in that direction as practicable, to ascertain the position and intentions of the enemy. This force should push forward with audacity, feel the enemy strongly, and make a strong diversion in that direction."

Twentieth Army Corps (McCook)--Move to Valley Head, "seize and hold Winston's Gap as soon as possible." Open communications with Thomas' Fourteenth Corps via Trenton.

Fourteenth Army Corps (Thomas)--Move to Trenton, seize Frick's and Stevens' Gaps through Lookout Mountain. Open communications with Crittenden's Twenty-First Corps.

Twenty-First Army Corps (Crittenden)--Advance up the Running Water Creek Valley, push along the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad "as near to Chattanooga as practicable and threaten the enemy in that direction."

Left Flank (command to be assumed by Brigadier General Hazen)--Threaten Chattanooga and, should the enemy fall back, "immediately take possession of that place."

These movements were to begin immediately and be completed by the evening of 4 September, an unrealistic expectation given the terrain, a fact which reveals much about the lack of understanding of the situation facing the Army of the Cumberland as it began the ascent over the mountains.¹

The Turning Movement--3-8 September

As the sun rose over the army commencing its move over the mountains, information regarding the enemy remained sparse. A report posted by Colonel McCook to the Cavalry Corps reported a heavy cloud of dust observed on the Chattanooga-Rome road. McCook himself observed the dust for two hours and reported the dust was continuous, leading him to conclude it was "either a heavy column or a train." McCook also provided uncertain information regarding Wheeler's location, concluding there was nothing substantial to his direct front. Brigadier General Mitchell reported that Wheeler with 2,000 men had left Alpine the morning of 3 September heading toward Chattanooga, reportedly en-route to Trenton.² At the Cavalry Corps Headquarters Stanley deemed these reports insignificant, writing in his 1900 summary of the day's activity that "There has been no important information collected to-day."³ This disturbing lack of

information from the cavalry arm was a trend that would continue throughout the campaign.

The shortage of mounted troops continued to plague the army on this day. The orders of 3 September specified that a regiment of Wilder's brigade would be returned to Thomas for his use and that a regiment of Minty's cavalry would be assigned to Crittenden. The respective commanders would balk at these detachments given their substantial tasking along the Tennessee River and the two corps commanders would remain blind to their fronts. In the rear Major General Granger continued to resist sending cavalry forward, stating, "Guerrilla parties and bands of thieves are organizing in all quarters. It certainly is not judicious to strip the railroad entirely of cavalry."⁴

The lack of mounted men able to undertake rapid route reconnaissance exacerbated another shortcoming, a lack of accurate maps. Writing from the Twentieth Army Corps headquarters, Chief of Staff Thruston notified Brigadier General Jefferson C. Davis that his request for cavalry had been denied and applauded the use of local guides "as we have no accurate maps of the country."⁵

A scout report dated 3 September must have raised expectations among the staff of the Army of the Cumberland. The scout, a man named Jno. H. Sherlock, had spent four days behind enemy lines and reported that at least some private soldiers were very discouraged. The scout had sent a man into Chattanooga every day attempting to learn Bragg's intentions. "He learned that it is Braggs intention to fight if the Federals cross over at Chattanooga but if they cross at Shellmount & advance by way of Chattanooga Valley over Lookout Mountain through Stevens Gap aiming to cut him off from Dalton & Rome that he will fall back to Dalton & fight there." The source of this high-level

intelligence regarding the enemy army commander's intent was an invalid, discharged former rebel soldier. The scout went on to report,

Bragg cannot raise more than 16,000 effective men and do his best. They have received no reinforcements from Johnston or anywhere else." "The secesh soldiers I heard talk said there would not be a fight at Chattanooga because the d__d Yankees would not come out and fight them fair, but try to surround & cut them off as they always did.

The scout went on to tell a fantastic story of his narrow escape from Confederate patrols, narrow escapes which cost the lives of his alleged accomplices, neatly eliminating any other sources of information. The scout also related there was a reward for his capture. This report is extremely questionable. The source provides few verifiable details and mostly relates private soldier-level gossip. The phrasing reflects the common practice amongst intelligence informants of telling their masters what they want to hear, particularly the comments regarding Union turning movements. This paid informant's information is completely inconsistent with the multi-disciplined reporting that had been examined from across the army's frontage, yet it appears to have been greatly trusted by Rosecrans and Garfield at the time.⁶

As the first day of the advance drew to a close Rosecrans submitted his daily report to Halleck in Washington. He reported minimal communication with his widely separated corps, including "No report from General McCook . . . None from the cavalry at Rawlingsville." Despite these concerns Rosecrans remained optimistic, with only the questions "any reason to think forces will be sent from Virginia to East Tennessee? Any that Joe Johnston has sent any forces up this way?" revealing the concerns which were starting to gnaw at his confidence.⁷

It was an eventful day in terms of intelligence activity on 4 September. A dispatch from General Bragg to D. H. Hill revealed the mindset of the Confederate commander and helps set the tone for subsequent Federal intelligence reporting. Bragg believed the Federals to have two corps on the south bank of the Tennessee and one on the north. Bragg proposed to Hill that he cross the Tennessee and “crush the corps opposite.” Bragg’s enthusiasm was palpable in his message: “The crushing of this corps would give us a great victory and redeem Tennessee. Can you be the instrument to do it?”

While the Confederates considered their options, the Federals sought to come to grips with their foe despite their lack of mounted troops. Major General Reynolds appealed to Thomas for the return of one of his mounted regiments, joining the chorus of commanders calling for cavalry.⁸

Meanwhile the Cavalry Corps to the south continued to demonstrate lethargy instead of the desired alacrity. General Crook colocated with Stanley at Winston’s. Colonel McCook was reported to have scouted as far as Rawlingsville, finding no enemy. Stanley wrote, “I am satisfied we can learn nothing of the enemy’s movements until we cross the mountain (into Broomtown Valley). I will see what I can find out to-morrow. It is no use to push cavalry any farther down this valley, as the road to Rome leads directly across to Broomtown Valley.” Stanley’s reluctance to conform to his orders from Rosecrans to “feel the enemy strongly” is reflected in his message to Colonel McCook directing that “until he (Stanley) gets some further information no extensive scout will be made.” Stanley did provide one useful piece of information to Garfield, although it was no doubt overlooked in the fixation on Rome: “In Broomtown Valley

Wheeler's forces have been scattered, but from all I can learn, Martin's force has moved toward Chattanooga." It was increasingly clear that Wheeler's cavalry was not screening to the west to protect a withdrawal of the army to the south, but rather closing up on the army in the Chattanooga area.⁹

Major General McCook was the first to perceive the outlines of the enemy course of action. It may have been a lack of confidence or reluctance to challenge Rosecrans' preconceptions that led McCook to report to his peer, Major General Thomas, "All my information leads me to believe that the grand concentration is taking place at Chattanooga. Joe Johnston is reported to be there; also Longstreet from Virginia." This information is notably absent from a message McCook sent to Garfield only thirty minutes prior. Garfield was only informed "The rebel cavalry has all moved toward Chattanooga." McCook no doubt sought Thomas' counsel prior to "firing a red star cluster" to use a modern phrase for sounding the warning. If that was McCook's hope there is no evidence he succeeded. Thomas forwarded no reporting to Rosecrans on this day.

On the northern flank Crittenden's corps completed its crossing of the Tennessee River at Shiloh by 2040. Hazen forwarded a report to Lieutenant Colonel Goddard at Department Headquarters relaying a deserter report that troops across the river were moving down-river in a leap-frog manner, "each garrison relieving the one below it each day."¹⁰

On this day Departmental Headquarters was distracted by its first forward displacement, moving from Stevenson across the Tennessee River via Bridgeport to Cave Springs, Alabama. The difficulties of communicating in such rough terrain across such a

wide frontage began to surface at this point, Rosecrans informing Halleck in his evening telegram (2300) that “No reports have reached me this evening from the front.” In the same message Rosecrans reveals by his language that he did not know with certainty where his corps were located.¹¹

Despite the tenuous communications and the distractions of displacing the headquarters Rosecrans and Garfield grew increasingly concerned about reports of Bragg receiving reinforcements. While at Bridgeport Garfield ordered Granger to hurry forward with the Reserve Corps. “Bragg is receiving some reinforcements from Johnston. You must leave minimum garrisons at all your posts and come forward with all the force you can possibly spare.”¹²

Rosecrans shared his estimate of the situation in a dispatch to Burnside also issued from Bridgeport stating “We shall move over the mountain upon the Dalton and Atlanta railroad as soon as possible, and attack Bragg if he does not run.” Rosecrans went on to appeal for Burnside to close down on his left flank, citing “much evidence to show that Johnston is re-enforcing Bragg with a considerable force.”¹³ The sources of this evidence are not included in the record unless it was the gathering chorus of low-level prisoner and deserter debriefings and citizen reports indicating Bragg’s increasing strength.

Rosecrans did not confine the voicing of his concerns to the theater. He reported to Halleck that a large force had been seen in the Loudon area. “Forrest retired that way, and Buckner had crossed the Tennessee. They will probably concentrate in the rear of Chattanooga.” Buckner and Bragg had clearly united. After requesting additional support from Burnside, Rosecrans asked “Is it not possible that Lee’s movements are

intended to cover the temporary detaching of troops to Bragg?"¹⁴ One day into the turning movement Rosecrans knew that Buckner and Forrest had closed on Bragg's main army, Wheeler's cavalry was moving toward Chattanooga, and an unknown number of reinforcements from Johnston were expected. The persistent rumors of additional reinforcement from Lee added to the seriousness of the situation.

On 5 September it opened with Garfield attempting to prod Stanley's cavalry forward with a wide-ranging set of orders that probably only added to Stanley's confusion. Garfield reiterated Rosecrans' instructions for the cavalry to move strongly on Rome then went on to task Stanley with opening a line of communication along the valley via Trenton and scouting thoroughly to the front. As if taskings in three different directions weren't enough, Garfield also told Stanley, "Our maps are very imperfect. Do all you can to correct and extend them."¹⁵ Garfield could not imagine the disarray in the cavalry corps. Colonel McCook continued to push feeble scouting efforts toward Alpine, reporting a brigade of Confederate cavalry located at that place. More ominously, McCook reported to Stanley that he had no implements for destroying enemy rails, "I have the honor to say that there are no clawhooks, crowbars, or any other means for tearing up tracks, in my command. There is no practical man connected with it who understands the construction of torpedoes or explosives of that character. We have no material to make them, except the ordinary ammunition with the ordnance train, which has not yet come up." McCook dispatched a captain and a "tired team" of mules to return to Stevenson to gather materials for breaking the line.¹⁶ Stanley closed out a day of farce in the cavalry by notifying Garfield he did not "want to start to interrupt the enemy's communications until Minty joins, unless the general desires me to go sooner." No

mention was made of the fact Stanley's troopers had no means for breaking the lines. Stanley also revealed his complete lack of aggressiveness by asking "how far I am to regulate my movements by those of the infantry."¹⁷ A combination of the wrong man in charge of the cavalry and an unrealistic stream of taskings from headquarters were paralyzing the army's eyes on the right.

McCook's corps fared little better, reporting from his headquarters at Winston's, "Nothing new. I am able to get no information of importance in regards to the movements of the enemy." Garfield dedicated considerable effort to closing up Sheridan's division from the north on McCook's left flank in Lookout Valley. Inadequate maps continued to handicap the army's efforts, Garfield apologizing to Sheridan at 2300 that night, "Our maps were incorrect. We had supposed these places much nearer to each other than they are."¹⁸ This lack of accurate information held up efforts to move the various corps to supporting positions and slowed the rate of advance across the army.

In the center of the army Thomas' corps moved forward, with Negley reconnoitering Lookout Mountain. Negley reported to Thomas "There is a prevalent rumor among some of the most intelligent citizens that re-enforcements are arriving at Chattanooga; that extensive preparations are being made to resist our approach toward Rome or Atlanta. The impression the enemy has of our movements is that our force was divided, diverging widely to flank on the north and south simultaneously; that Bragg was preparing to meet these wings in detail." Additionally Negley reported that a large force of enemy cavalry had moved from General McCook's front to monitor the advance of Thomas' corps.¹⁹

Thomas did not forward these details to Rosecrans' headquarters. One can surmise that he discussed this information in person with Rosecrans when he visited Trenton the afternoon of 5 September or upon the displacement of the headquarters on 6 September. Thomas did submit a report from atop Lookout Mountain to Rosecrans that included the following confusing information. Deserters had come into Negley's camp the night of 4 September, and "one direct from Chattanooga says that Bragg is there with 25,000 troops, more or less demoralized and all anxious to get away; is of the impression that he will fight at Chattanooga." Here is a clear insight into the disjoint between the desires and rumors among the rank and file and the intent of General Bragg.

The enemy was extremely active in the north on the 5 August, and extensive and confusing information was reported by the northern flank of the army in the course of the day. Brigadier General Hazen began the day's reporting at 0800 with a message to Lieutenant Colonel Goddard describing clouds of dust and movements all day on the 4 August that "strongly indicated a general movement of the enemy in the direction of Tyner's Station."²⁰

This report of enemy withdrawal was promptly contradicted by Colonel Wilder, who reported at 1000 "Their camp appears to be much increased since yesterday morning. They have reliable news of our force on this side, and appear to be concentrating either at Chattanooga or for a movement further south." Wilder cited multiple sources for this information and stated that Brigadier General Wagner agreed with his assessment. At 1415 Wilder submitted an alarming report directly to Rosecrans; "The enemy have laid their pontoon-bridges and now have them ready to swing round preparatory to crossing. Reliable news." This information directly supported an enemy

course of action Rosecrans expected, an enemy counterstroke against his left flank and Burnside's right flank, and had great effect on the commander. By 1900 Wilder reported he had fired on the pontoon bridge and moved his trains up the mountain "so as to be prepared for anything." Indications of a possible enemy attack continued to accumulate. "More camp fires back of Chattanooga than ever before. Ambulances have been busy to-day running between Chattanooga and the direction of Tyner's, as if disposing of their sick preparatory to a move." And most alarmingly, deserters reported, "Longstreet's corps from Lee's army is arriving." By 2325 that night Wilder appears to have calmed somewhat, stating that deserters believed Bragg was only making a feint to cover his retreat, an opinion seconded by citizen reports. Additionally Wilder reported "Breckenridge's division is the only force from Johnston's army yet here."²¹

In his summary of the day Rosecrans reported events to Major General Halleck in a matter-of-fact manner that demonstrated cautious awareness of the possible threat. He reported that the enemy had prepared a pontoon bridge "with the apparent intention of crossing. I have ordered General Granger to bring up all available reserves to Bridgeport and Stevenson, leaving minimum garrisons at all posts."²² More revealing is Rosecrans' telegram to Burnside of the same date, "Indications are now the rebels will concentrate and fight us at Chattanooga."²³ Rosecrans' own telegrams indicate he believed Bragg disposed to conduct a counterattack involving crossing a major river and that he now believed Bragg would indeed concentrate and fight for Chattanooga. Despite this new estimate of the situation Rosecrans remained wedded to his previous plan with his corps widely dispersed in the mountains and his cavalry dedicated to a deep thrust against the enemy's lines of communication.

On 6 September Garfield saw the departmental headquarters displacing from Cave Spring to Trenton and adjudicating a contentious dispute between Brigadier Generals Hazen and Wagner leaving little time for actually analyzing the situation. No reporting of significance came from the southern or right wing of the army, and the cavalry remained stalled. Beatty's brigade of Negley's division moved to seize Stevens' Gap as the remainder of the division crested Lookout Mountain. Thomas' divisions found the Confederates had sent out parties to obstruct all roads across the mountains. Thomas reported that the day's intelligence (collected by a scout of General Sheridan's) led him to believe there were two Confederate divisions at Chattanooga with the balance of Bragg's force "concentrated at the tunnel about 10 miles from Chattanooga." He added, "the impression among the citizens is that they will retire if they can to Atlanta." Sheridan forwarded this same information directly to Garfield later in the day.²⁴

As General Negley pushed up Lookout Mountain he grew apprehensive, informing Thomas, "The enemy have a very favorable opportunity for observing our movements and correctly estimating our force. The bold, sharp brow of Lookout Mountain, with an almost perpendicular face, overlooks the entire valley."

To the north General Crittenden submitted the most significant intelligence report of the day at 0935. "Bragg's headquarters are at Ringgold, and he lately made a speech at Chattanooga stating that he had been very much blamed for retreating, and that now he was going to fight, at all events, before he again retreated."²⁵ Crittenden also forwarded debriefings of multiple deserters indicating that Bragg had approximately 50,000 men available at Chattanooga including Buckner's men and reinforcements from Johnston. It was reported that "Bragg told Genl Cheatham that he wanted all his troops to know that

he was going to fight at Chattanooga.” At 2030 the evening of the 6th further information was received from General Crittenden including a scout report that Johnston had brought 20,000 men from Mississippi and that “The general understanding is that Chattanooga is to be defended.”²⁶

On the left flank of the army the anticipated Confederate counterattack did not materialize. Wilder reported, “All quiet this A.M.” The enemy had demonstrated but did not cross, and Wilder still reported a large camp at Tyner’s Station.²⁷

As the day drew to a close the communications issued from Rosecrans’ headquarters revealed complete confusion regarding enemy intent. At 2130 Garfield directed Major General Sheridan, a division commander two echelons below the army commander, to “take every means in your power to ascertain the intentions and movements of the enemy.”²⁸

At 2200 Garfield sent a dispatch to Stanley repeating Rosecrans’ orders to “push the enemy sharply, and if possible strike the railroad.” A new twist was added, “The enemy appear to be preparing for making a stand at Chattanooga, and it is of the utmost importance that his line of communications be broken. Forrest and a part of Wheeler’s force being in the vicinity of Chattanooga, you can attack with impunity. . . in the direction of Rome and the railroad.”

The next dispatch from Garfield’s desk bore Rosecrans’ signature and went to Halleck in Washington at 2300. Rosecrans reported the disposition of his forces and then summarized the enemy situation. “Enemy still in force in Chattanooga, threatening to cross the river. All reports concur that Johnston and Breckenridge are with Bragg.

Buckner is closing down, and has destroyed the bridge at Loudon. Enemy attempting today to obstruct passes of Lookout Mountain. No word from Burnside.”²⁹

At 2330 Garfield (probably drafting as Rosecrans dictated or directed) sent a message to Crittenden acknowledging receipt of the day’s reports and directing that Wood’s division go forward to reconnoiter the point of Lookout Mountain. The message continued, “There is considerable evidence today that the enemy is preparing to fall back on Dalton, and has already moved part of his force.”³⁰

The implication of this series of messages is stunning. In two hours Rosecrans and Garfield had painted three distinctly different pictures of the enemy. They prompted Sheridan, the demonstrated master of intelligence collection, to find out what was going on. They then tasked Stanley to break the enemy’s communications as the Confederates prepared to make a stand. Halleck was told the enemy had concentrated considerable force in the area and left to draw his own conclusion regarding the enemy course of action, and Crittenden was told the enemy was preparing to fall back to Dalton!

There are two possible explanations for this erratic estimation of the situation; either Rosecrans and Garfield had become so exhausted by their duties they had completely lost the ability to track the substantial and confusing intelligence reporting, or, more ominously, they were using projected enemy actions to induce desired actions by the addressees. Stanley was told of an enemy stand to induce him to cut the rail lines – a task he had dodged for days. Crittenden was told of an enemy withdrawal to induce him to move aggressively toward Chattanooga and seize the city, should the opportunity present itself. Finally Halleck was told of the enemy’s growing concentration to compel him to dictate closer coordination between Burnside and Rosecrans, preferably with

Rosecrans in command. The implications of either of these possible explanations were grave for the Army of the Cumberland.

There was little respite for Rosecrans and his staff on 7 September. Countless hours of the day were spent adjudicating a dispute between Brigadier General Wood and Major General Crittenden. The dispute had begun the evening of 6 September and at 0315 in the morning on the 7th Major Bond drafted a dispatch, clearly at the direction of General Rosecrans, addressing the issue. The substance of the dispute has little bearing on our topic and has been well documented in other works. However, the diffusion of effort by the staff at this critical time, and the continued lack of rest for Rosecrans, relates directly to the staff's efforts to develop the enemy situation.³¹

The day began with Burnside reporting at 0600 that his cavalry had linked up with Rosecrans left flank, however this good news was tempered by Burnside's immediate departure to the east to attack the Cumberland Gap. Despite Rosecrans' repeated requests for assistance on the flank Burnside was turning in the opposite direction, leaving General Hartstuff and a garrison force in place at Knoxville.³²

Major General Stanley sent the now traditional daily excuse for inaction at 1030. Yet again he reported, "I will start in the morning and endeavor to strike the railroad." The day's litany of excuses included a lack of troops ("I have but thirteen small regiments here") and Stanley repeated his completely unreasonable request for the return of Minty, then actively engaged at the extreme opposite flank of the army.³³

Major General McCook forwarded no information to department headquarters, although he did tell Sheridan "We have no news of the enemy, save that a large body of cavalry came up on Lookout this morning." McCook thought all the Confederate cavalry

was in Broomtown Valley and voiced concern for Stanley's move into the valley--
"tomorrow."³⁴

Along Thomas' frontage Negley generated some reporting of value. Negley moved to the top of Lookout Mountain and was moving to secure Stevens', Frick's, and Cooper's Gaps. As he moved forward Negley stated succinctly, "I regret the want of some cavalry." In an attempt to gather some information on enemy dispositions in McLemore's Cove he requested "that a secret-service fund of at least \$1,000 be placed in the hands of my quartermaster. I am compelled to advance money for this purpose from private funds. These people are so poor and dependent that when employed upon this business (which they appear to be willing to undertake) they should be paid at once. There are several trustworthy loyalists in this vicinity."³⁵

A deserter report was submitted by Colonel Smith D. Atkins, 92nd Illinois Mounted Infantry, to Thomas' headquarters stating that a rebel clerk from the quartermaster's department of Bragg's army reported that Johnston had reinforced Bragg, "and that they all said Bragg had 60,000 fighting men, and they were bound to fight it out at Chattanooga."³⁶

The sole report of value from Crittenden's corps came from General Wood at 1400. A prisoner debriefing indicated the enemy had a total force of 100,000, including 30,000 cavalry. The prisoner reported that Bragg had issued an order that was read to the soldiers, "telling them to hold in readiness for a desperate conflict, and that he (Bragg) intended to give them all the fighting they wanted."³⁷

The northern flank was quiet. At 0600 Brigadier General Hazen relayed that Colonel Minty reported the enemy continuing to fall back from the river, and Brigadier

General Wagner reported that Buckner was “pressing down the railroad in the direction of Rome. Not very reliable.”³⁸

As Rosecrans and Garfield drafted the evening’s correspondence Wood’s report of enemy strength at Chattanooga (somehow adjusted downward to 50,000) was widely disseminated. At 2030 Garfield directed Stanley yet again to “push forward rapidly and with audacity. The severing of the enemy railroad communication with Atlanta will be the most disastrous to him.” Garfield continued to report that almost all of Wheeler’s cavalry was in Chattanooga.³⁹

McCook’s orders were the next product of the evening. He was directed to advance two brigades to Alpine to assist Stanley’s cavalry and to post a brigade to assure control of the pass through Lookout Mountain. Wood’s report of 50,000 enemy in Chattanooga was passed along as well.⁴⁰

Captain Drouillard relieved Garfield of drafting duty and produced Major General Thomas’ message for the evening. Rosecrans inquired of the status of Stevens’ Gap, relayed “Hazen and Wilder report a gradual evacuation of rebels from points under their observation.” and repeated Wood’s report of 50,000.

The long night’s work of 7 September concluded with a shocking exchange between Rosecrans and Halleck. Earlier on 6 September Halleck had cabled to Rosecrans, “You give me no information on the position of Bragg and Buckner. If they have united, it is important that you and Burnside unite as quickly as possible, so that the enemy may not attack you separately.”⁴¹ Halleck’s concern was disingenuous at best. Only Halleck, acting as General-in-Chief, had the authority to order Burnside to unite with Rosecrans. Rosecrans had been complaining for some time of the lack of

cooperation from Burnside. Halleck may have even known that that very evening Burnside was preparing to turn east from Knoxville and move against the Cumberland Gap, turning his back on Rosecrans. Regardless of Halleck's foreknowledge or approval of Burnside's move, Rosecrans was fully advised of Burnside's intent as he dictated his reply.

Rosecrans' midnight response was blistering, and worthy of quotation in full:

Maj. Gen. H.W. Halleck,
General-in-Chief:

Your dispatch of yesterday received with surprise. You have been often and fully advised of the nature of the country that makes it impossible for this army to prevent Johnston from combining with Bragg. When orders for an advance of this army were made, it must have been known that those two rebel forces would combine against it, and, to some extent, choose their place of fighting us. This has doubtless been done, and Buckner, Johnston, and Bragg are all near Chattanooga. The movement on East Tennessee was independent of mine. Your apprehensions are just, and the legitimate consequences of your orders. The best that can now be done is for Burnside to close his cavalry down on our left, supporting it with his infantry, and, refusing his left, threaten the enemy, without getting into his grasp, while we get him in our grip and strangle him, or perish in the attempt.

W.S. ROSECRANS
Major-General

On 8 September 1863, was a quiet day. All along the frontage of the Army of the Cumberland soldiers struggled to climb the tortuous paths up the western slopes of Lookout Mountain. General Rosecrans found time to draft a telegram to Secretary of War Stanton that reveals much about the man. The topic of the telegram was pay for noncommissioned officers of the colored regiments of his army. Rosecrans found it "manifestly unjust" that these men should "only receive the pay of privates" and inquired if there was any legal way he might remedy the situation. This message was completely

in character for Rosecrans, the morally upright and dedicated crusader for his men, all of his men. It was also in character for Rosecrans to dedicate energy and focus to such a topic as his army advanced to “strangle” the foe or “perish in the attempt.” It is unfortunate Rosecrans did not dedicate as much effort to understanding that foe.⁴²

As the day wore on it became apparent the Confederates were abandoning Chattanooga, as anticipated by Rosecrans and foretold by numerous intelligence sources. The initial report came from Brigadier General Wagner at noon, a deserter report indicating the city had been evacuated and anecdotal information indicating the army was moving to Rome, Georgia.⁴³

At 1920 Negley reported that he had seized Cooper’s and Stevens’ Gaps. He also reported “on a road running northeast across the valley as though from McFarland’s Crossroads, about 9 miles from Cooper’s Gap, toward Chattanooga, a heavy cloud of dust has been observed all day.” Unfortunately this report of heavy enemy movement along what was probably the La Fayette Road in McLemore’s Cove was not forwarded from Thomas to Rosecrans.⁴⁴

The comedy of errors on the right flank continued. A messenger from the cavalry corps turned up at Rosecrans’ headquarters seeking turpentine, whether for bridges or horses the messenger was unsure. What the messenger did not bring was any news from Stanley, reporting that the cavalry remained on the west side of the mountain intending to move “in the morning.” Rosecrans issued a severe rebuke of Stanley, stating “So far your command has been a mere picket guard for our advance” and inquiring “Why have you not supplied your command with means of burning bridges and destroying railroads?”⁴⁵ Stanley remained unperturbed, reporting to Garfield that his force was

unable to move "on account of deficiency of horseshoes." He reported his intent to move on the now familiar "tomorrow."⁴⁶

Rosecrans summoned Thomas and Crittenden to department headquarters at Trenton to consider his instructions for the next, decisive phase of the campaign. A decision point had been reached. The enemy was apparently yielding Chattanooga without a fight due to the deep turning movement and Rosecrans now faced a choice between consolidating the army on Chattanooga, the objective point of the campaign, or pressing forward in an attempt to engage Bragg's army in a decisive battle. Rosecrans had little information on which to base his decision. He knew Bragg had been reinforced, and was apparently comfortable with the force estimate of 50,000. He knew the majority of Bragg's army was located to the east of Chattanooga in the vicinity of Tyner's Station with cavalry on the flanks and screening forward along the passes through Lookout Mountain. He also had numerous reports Bragg intended to offer battle (which was in keeping with Bragg's character) and had stated as much in his telegram to Halleck the night prior. Despite these factors Rosecrans determined to mount a "pursuit" and order a general advance as one would against a fleeing foe. However orders for the pursuit were not immediately forthcoming, however. Rosecrans contented himself with ordering Crittenden and Wagner into the city with Thomas prepared to support. By 2030 Wagner was able to confirm the evacuation of Chattanooga, although Rosecrans' headquarters did not receive this final confirmation until approximately 0330 on 9 September.

Evening orders did go out to McCook and Stanley at 2300. McCook was told "the enemy is evacuating Chattanooga and moving south; a part of his force has already reached the northern spur of Missionary Ridge. We must know as speedily as possible

what route he is taking.” McCook was ordered to send one brigade in support of Crook’s cavalry moving north along the Chattanooga road and another brigade in support of Stanley’s long-anticipated move to Alpine. Rosecrans’ intent was clearly revealed in the closing lines, “The general commanding directs you to hold your whole command in readiness for a forward movement.”⁴⁷

General Stanley received yet another set of instructions, drafted by Garfield. He was directed to conduct reconnaissance to the east pushing through Alpine to Summerville and to the north along the Chattanooga road as far as the southern spur of Missionary Ridge. Garfield appended the now familiar encouragement that “The enemy is believed to be in full retreat, and it is most important to know where he is going and by what routes. You have not a moment to lose in starting these expeditions.”⁴⁸

Orders issued for the evening, Rosecrans now prepared his update for Halleck in Washington. The language of this telegram, released at 0030 on 9 September, was notably more restrained than that of the orders to the corps commanders. Halleck was informed “Information to-night leads to the belief that the enemy has decided not to fight us at Chattanooga.” Crittenden was reported moving to Lookout in readiness to enter Chattanooga if practicable.

Rosecrans had convinced himself the enemy was in full retreat despite numerous indicators Bragg had merely yielded the untenable position in the city itself. Ironically Bragg issued orders to Major General Wheeler at 2330, precisely the same time Garfield was describing the Confederate army as “in full retreat.” Wheeler was told to concentrate his main force on La Fayette. The army would soon follow; “We will concentrate to-

morrow within 5 miles of La Fayette.”⁴⁹ The fate of the Army of the Cumberland was decided the night of 8 September, orders to follow the morning of the 9 September.

¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 323-324.

²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 332.

³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 331.

⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 328.

⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 326.

⁶ Summaries of the News reaching Headquarters of General W.S. Rosecrans, 1863-1864, RG 393, part 1, entry 986, National Archives, Washington DC, 3 September Entry.

⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 321.

⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 344.

⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 353-355.

¹⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 350.

¹¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 339.

¹²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 351.

¹³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 357.

¹⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 339.

¹⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 374.

¹⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 375.

¹⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 374.

¹⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 368.

¹⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 364.

²⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 371.

²¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 1000 and 1415 reports 365, 1900 report 366-367, 2325 report 367.

²²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 362.

²³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 378.

²⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, Thomas 383, Sheridan 388.

²⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 390-391.

²⁶ Summaries of the News reaching Headquarters of General W.S. Rosecrans, 1863-1864, RG 393, part 1, entry 986, National Archives, Washington D.C., 6 September Entry.

²⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 385.

²⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 390.

²⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 381.

³⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 391.

³¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 414.

³²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 433.

³³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 431-432.

³⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 413.

³⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 408-409.

³⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 412.

³⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 418.

³⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, Hazen 429, Wagner 426.

³⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 432.

⁴⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 412.

⁴¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 381.

⁴²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, Telegram to Stanton 441-442, “perish in the attempt” from telegram to Halleck 406.

⁴³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 459-460.

⁴⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 448-449.

⁴⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 467-468.

⁴⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 468.

⁴⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 451.

⁴⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 468-469.

⁴⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part IV, 627.

CHAPTER 8

INTO THE VALLEY OF DEATH 9 SEPTEMBER--16 SEPTEMBER 1863

9 September 1863

Work continued into the early morning hours of 9 September at Rosecrans' headquarters. After receipt of Brigadier General Wagner's 2030 confirmation of Confederate withdrawal from Chattanooga shortly before 0330, General Thomas was summoned to department headquarters to "consult in regard to arrangements for the pursuit." The language is important, as it indicates Rosecrans' state of mind--already focused on "pursuit." Thomas also received orders to "order your whole command in readiness to move at once."¹ Rosecrans was not going to allow Bragg to escape unscathed again. Garfield drafted orders to Crittenden at 0330 directing him to "Throw your whole command forward (with five days' rations) without delay, and make a vigorous pursuit."

An important memo from a loyal citizen appears in the record on 9 September. While the time of receipt is not annotated, the tone of the report could only have increased Rosecrans' enthusiasm for an aggressive pursuit of Bragg. A certain Mr. Thompson, characterized as a "very loyal citizen of Chattanooga" reported "One corps retreated by the Cove road (this road probably leads into the LaFayette road); one corps retreated by the LaFayette road proper. Buckner's corps retreated from Tyner's Station, via Ringgold, to Rome. The army has retreated to Rome, where it is said that it will make a stand." The informant went on to report, "If we pursue vigorously they will not stop short of Atlanta. Troops badly demoralized; all feel that they are whipped; one-

seventh of the troops mostly naked; the rations for three days would make one good meal." This highly exaggerated report bore just enough verifiable information to give it some credibility. Additionally the editorial comments regarding the condition of Bragg's army reinforced what Rosecrans wanted to believe. There is no evidence anyone questioned the considerable inconsistency of this report with the vast majority of reporting received over the previous several weeks.²

By 0800, even as Federal troops moved into Chattanooga, and prior to confirmation of the fall of the city, Rosecrans had solidified his critical decision to pursue Bragg rather than consolidate his widely dispersed army near Chattanooga. Garfield drafted orders amplifying his 0330 instructions to Major General Crittenden. The already aggressive tone of Crittenden's orders was further amplified: "Leave a light brigade to hold Chattanooga and with the balance of your command pursue the enemy with the utmost vigor. Attack his rear whenever you can do so with a fair opportunity to inflict injury upon him." Rosecrans' estimate of Bragg's movements is revealed in the following line, "Your march will probably lead you near Ringgold and from thence to the vicinity of Dalton."

At 1000 Garfield drafted the following orders to General Thomas which provide an excellent overview of Rosecrans' plan at this point.

The general commanding has ordered a general pursuit of the enemy by the whole army. General Crittenden has started to occupy Chattanooga and pursue the line of Bragg's retreat. Our force across the river from Chattanooga has been ordered to cross and join General Crittenden in the pursuit. General McCook has been ordered to move at once on Alpine and Summerville. The general commanding directs you to move your command as rapidly as possible to La Fayette and make every exertion to strike the enemy in flank, and, if possible, to cut-off his escape.

Rosecrans envisioned Crittenden's corps pursuing along Bragg's route to his rear, Thomas' corps striking Bragg's flank somewhere near LaFayette and McCook's corps striking the head of Bragg's column enroute to Georgia. This aggressive and complicated movement may have stood some chance of success if Rosecrans had known Bragg's location, but he was entirely reliant on questionable citizen, prisoner, and source reporting. The record reveals no confirmed sightings of Bragg's columns upon which Rosecrans could base his plan. The limited cavalry available to the army was ill-located to support this aggressive concentration of three corps from different directions, and the commanders of the flank corps had not demonstrated much spirit or capability for aggressive independent action so far in the campaign. Rosecrans' orders on the morning of 9 September set the scene for the remainder of the campaign. All intelligence arriving at the headquarters after this time would now be filtered by Rosecrans' preconceptions of the situation and the burden of proof would fall to any officer attempting to change the general's understanding of the situation.³

McCook's orders for the morning (issued at 0900) were even more aggressive than those of Thomas'. McCook was directed to "Move as rapidly as possible on Alpine and Summerville, for the purpose of intercepting the enemy in his retreat; move on so as to strike him in flank, if possible. Attack him whenever you can reach him with reasonable chances of success. The main body of the rebel force cannot now be more than two days distant from Chattanooga, and the general commanding has strong hopes that you may inflict most serious injury upon them."⁴ McCook's reply to these orders, dispatched at 1835 on 9 September, it would have done nothing to dissuade Rosecrans from his selected course of action. McCook relayed that "a man named Taylor. . . saw a

man named Robertson, who had just returned from Bragg's army. He reports the army moving by cars and marching, and says their destination is Rome, Georgia, where they intend concentrating and giving us battle."⁵

Orders issued, Rosecrans' headquarters now went into receive mode and awaited reports on the progress of the offensive. First to arrive was confirmation of the fall of Chattanooga, reported by Lieutenant Landrum's signal station opposite Chattanooga at 1100: "The Stars and Stripes were raised on Mound Fort at 11 a.m. The last of the enemy left as our men entered, without firing a gun. Generals Crittenden and Wood are in Chattanooga."⁶ While this was welcome news and no doubt cause for celebration in the headquarters, Rosecrans was clearly haunted by his last experience with bloodless victory at Tullahoma. As Crittenden's men entered the city information regarding the retreat of Bragg was forwarded up the chain of command. Colonel Smith Atkins of the Ninety-Second Illinois reported Bragg's force "Left with infantry and artillery night before last; some passing yesterday for La Fayette. Bragg's entire force is variously estimated at 60,000 to 90,000. Johnston was here. The enemy all said they would give battle at Rome." The mention of Rome as a rallying point and next line of resistance is significant, as it was based on fact. General Bragg had issued orders to his army via circular on 6 September directing "I. The troops of this army will move immediately toward Rome in four columns." While implementation of this order was delayed for twenty-four hours, it was the marching order upon which the army eventually departed the city. While the order did state "toward Rome" it went on to prescribe routes leading the LaFayette and Summerville areas, well short of Rome itself. Additionally the introductory line of the circular stated the purpose of the order was "In order to meet the

enemy and strike him” Fragmentary information reaching Rosecrans from citizens and deserters only relayed that Bragg’s army was moving “to Rome,” significantly different than the actual orders “toward Rome.” Contrary to the speculation by some modern historians, there is no indication of any deliberate deception or disinformation campaign by the Confederates in the available intelligence reporting.⁷

Brigadier General Wood submitted a brief report at 1130 which was promptly forwarded to Garfield from Crittenden’s headquarters at 1145. Wood reported he could see “large clouds of dust, indicating troops moving south” from the spur of Lookout Mountain. This report should have caused concern as Rosecrans believed the major enemy force to be up to two days’ march from Chattanooga at this time.⁸

The most significant report of the afternoon was submitted by General Crittenden himself shortly after he arrived in Chattanooga. At 1400 he reported the main rebel army was reported to have withdrawn over the road to LaFayette. Most ominously Crittenden relayed “There are various rumors of Bragg having stated that he just wanted to get us in here, that he is not far off, but I am not a bit scared.” Crittenden’s confidence or bravado, combined with Rosecrans’ estimate of the situation relayed in the morning’s orders, caused Crittenden to dismiss a critical piece of intelligence. There is no evidence either Garfield or Rosecrans investigated this report any further, as they were preparing to move to Chattanooga.

Another development occurred that afternoon that no doubt received considerable attention from Rosecrans and influenced his decisions that day. Word arrived that Assistant Secretary of War Dana would be arriving at Bridgeport the evening of 9 September. Instructions were forwarded to the commander in Bridgeport to “Provide

means for him to come on to Chattanooga to-morrow, where headquarters will be to-morrow night.” Given Rosecrans’ history of poor relations with Secretary of War Stanton he must have been delighted to be able to receive Dana in Chattanooga, the objective point of the campaign and the key to the Deep South. Political considerations overcame any military reservations Rosecrans may have had regarding shifting his headquarters to Chattanooga, far to the left flank of his widely dispersed army. The imminent arrival of the Assistant Secretary, a well-known source of information for the Secretary, must also have only increased Rosecrans’ determination to prevent Bragg from escaping Chattanooga without a battle.⁹

At 2030 Rosecrans released a triumphant telegram to General Halleck. “Chattanooga is ours without a struggle, and East Tennessee is free.” Ever mindful of the lack of praise for his masterful Middle Tennessee campaign of maneuver Rosecrans continued, “Our move on the enemy’s flank and rear progresses, while the tail of his retreating column will not escape unmolested.”¹⁰

Even as Rosecrans relayed the good news to Washington, Thomas released an update to Garfield relaying citizen reports gathered early in the afternoon by Negley’s division in McLemore’s Cove. Negley reported “That a force of three or four divisions, including infantry, cavalry, and artillery, concentrated in his front at Dug Gap, on Pigeon Ridge, last night, and are making preparations to resist our advance.” Negley indicated he would seek further confirmation of this report.¹¹ By the end of the day Negley could report he had pushed Confederate cavalry back to their headquarters along Chickamauga Creek. An agent of Negley’s by the name of Citizen Bailey returned from a trip to Ringgold and reported the Confederate army was falling back to Rome and Atlanta.

Despite the earlier reports of large Confederate forces located on Pigeon Mountain Negley concluded, "All the information I have received this evening from my scouts and others induces the belief that there is no considerable rebel force this side of Dalton."¹² Negley would soon have reason to regret his dismissal of those particular citizen reports.

As the evening orders session wound down Rosecrans dispatched a second telegram to General Halleck which reveals his continued failure to grasp the situation. Rosecrans wrote, "I did not, in my last telegram, lay enough stress on uniting Burnside's cavalry with mine. The two combined can control the country far into the interior, and prevent the enemy from gathering crops." Even as his corps commanders appealed urgently for cavalry to reconnoiter in front of their dispersed columns in the highly compartmented ground, Rosecrans was envisioning using cavalry to fight an independent deep action. He had yet to realize the cost of deploying virtually all of his mounted men on his southernmost flank and tasking them with independent actions deep in the enemy rear instead of using them to scout ahead of his army.¹³

The most significant intelligence coup of the day is mysteriously absent from the official record. "The Summaries of the News Reaching the Headquarters of General R.S. Rosecrans, 1863-1864" in the National Archives contains an entry on 9 September detailing an intercepted order from Confederate Major General Wheeler. "Number 1" of the subject intercepted orders is not significant; however, Numbers 2 and 3 are critical.

No. 2, same date from Lafayette. Genl Wheeler directs Maj. Hill to move with his command immediately to Lafayette Ga. & to send courier in advance to the comdg officer at Alpine to notify him of your approach.

No. 3. If forced back from Alpine to cause a portion of his force to fall back in the direction of Lafayette & to send a courier back to Lafayette with statement of the enemys force which drove him back from Alpine. This he is directed to ascertain by any means in his power, as it is very important that the commanding

officer should know it. The Elite Corps at Cedar Bluff under Maj. Hill will receive orders by this courier to move to Lafayette.¹⁴

This order describes a concentration of Confederate cavalry forces from their left flank screen to LaFayette and reveals the priority mission of screening LaFayette strongly. Equally significant is what is missing from these orders. A cavalry screen dedicated to covering the withdrawal of the army would be oriented on a force, the column in question, rather than a geographical point. This point seems subtle, yet a focused analyst would note the inconsistency of the tone of these orders with the flexible screen of a cavalry force as part of an army withdrawing. At the very least Rosecrans should have deduced the enemy was defending LaFayette, probably in strength given the emphasis on the cavalry screen.

10 September 1863

As the lead elements of Major General Thomas' Fourteenth Army Corps moved into the jaws of the trap General Bragg had prepared in McLemore's Cove, Rosecrans moved his headquarters north from Trenton to Chattanooga. The political attraction of this move is undeniable. Rosecrans' telegrams would bear the annotation "Chattanooga" across the top and he could cement his victory in Eastern Tennessee. Additionally he could receive Assistant Secretary of War Dana at the objective point of this campaign--a considerable attraction for Rosecrans. These understandable motivations obscured the poor military logic of the move. The army was still widely dispersed. The enemy remained completely unlocated and enemy intent was unknown. At this critical moment Rosecrans chose to move himself to the far left or northern flank of his army, further

extending his already strained lines of communication and delaying the speed of information flow and resultant decision making.

En-route to Chattanooga Rosecrans notified Thomas of the move and directed the establishment and maintenance of courier lines. A second dispatch accompanied this one, directing Thomas to “open direct communication with General McCook” which effectively placed an echelon between Rosecrans and his rightmost corps commander. More ominous were the additional instructions issued to Thomas: “Take care to hurt the enemy as much as possible. It is important to know whether he retreats on Rome or Cedar Bluff. If the enemy has passed La Fayette toward Rome, he will threaten McCook; if he has not passed this point, he will endanger Crittenden. Much depends on the promptitude of your movements.” Rosecrans’ instructions reveal two things: he had completely lost track of Bragg’s army, and he had no coherent estimate of the enemy course of action. The postulation of threats to Crittenden and McCook is disconcerting. As we know he missed the third and actual Confederate course of action, which was to concentrate near LaFayette and threaten Thomas’ corps. The thought process in this estimate is also troubling. Rosecrans had ordered a general pursuit of a retreating enemy army, stressing aggressiveness to all his commanders, yet his estimate of the situation in this dispatch to Thomas is completely inconsistent with his previous instructions, and reveals he knew Bragg was capable of turning upon his pursuers at any moment. Despite these concerns and an apparent understanding of the decisive nature of the ground at LaFayette Rosecrans still displaced to Chattanooga.¹⁵ Rosecrans’ actions at this decision point constitute a major error of judgment.

At 0705 in the morning Major General Palmer forwarded a significant report to Crittenden's headquarters. He had dispatched forces toward both Ringgold to the east and along the LaFayette road to the south. The road to Ringgold was reported clear of enemy, while the force moving toward LaFayette experienced a sharp skirmish and noted signs of a large number of cattle and sheep having moved along the road--a clear indicator of the route of Bragg's army. Palmer summarized his opinion stating, "The best information I can get is that the bulk of the enemy have taken the La Fayette road. A negro reports that Bragg, yesterday morning, was at Gordon's Mills, and he also says our troops had possession of the road to his front, or, to use the words of the negro, "Bragg was cut off." This report was corroborated by another individual who passed by Gordon's Mills the previous day and reported, "2,000 infantry there grinding meal and cooking, and said they would march again last night."¹⁶

Palmer would comply with his orders and continue his "pursuit" along the LaFayette road. At 1345 Palmer wrote from Pea Vine Creek to report a sharp skirmish with Confederate troops. A Confederate cavalry force, estimated at 300 to 600, charged the First Kentucky Regiment, capturing two officers and fifty-eight men. Palmer encamped at that location to sort out the situation. By the end of the day he had regained his confidence and reported, "I am also confident in the belief that all the forces are moving toward Rome for concentration." He reached this conclusion despite the fact Confederate cavalry was to his front and right and had been exchanging shots with his men all evening, maintaining contact and delaying his advance.¹⁷

Reporting from Chickamauga Bridge, near Palmer's position, Brigadier General Wood relayed information gathered from a contraband:

He says General Bragg was at Gordon's Mills at 12m. today. He says he knows General Bragg very well, by sight, having seen him frequently. He says the troops that had marched on that road toward La Fayette yesterday marched back toward Chattanooga this morning, and the soldiers said they were going back to Chattanooga. He says there were many soldiers and many cannon with them." Suffering from the same preconceived enemy template as the other Union commanders, Wood went on, "I do not give this narrative because I think it of great importance nor because I credit it (for this I do not), but because, if true, it should be known: and perhaps either General Crittenden or General Rosecrans may have some information which may corroborate or refute it."¹⁸ Having registered his disbelief of these reports in his report to higher headquarters, Wood now asked Major General Palmer, his adjacent division commander and peer, "Do you hear anything of the enemy on our right? I hear he is not far off."¹⁹

Further to the south Negley continued to edge forward into McLemore's Cove.

Intelligence continued to accumulate indicating a large force was indeed to Negley's front. Negley reported to Baird, "Two of my most reliable scouts have just returned and report the following information as reliable: Cleburne's, Cheatham's and French's divisions left Chattanooga on Monday evening at 7 p.m., marched twelve miles and reached La Fayette on Tuesday evening and night. The intention was to resist our advance toward La Fayette. . . . The scouts saw the divisions mentioned on the march, but they are not confident that they halted at La Fayette, but were informed by citizens that they moved on to the support of Wheeler against McCook." Negley passed along his estimate there was "not more than a brigade of cavalry at La Fayette" but still requested that Baird move forward to within supporting distance. Negley went on to elaborate on the justification for this request: "The road is heavily blockaded four miles south of this, and it is beyond that point that the enemy proposed to give battle when they left Chattanooga." Negley's scouts also reported "They overheard a colonel in Cheatham's division say that they expected to overwhelm and destroy some of our advanced divisions."

Negley grew more concerned as the day wore on and at 2130 he reported "My scouts all report the appearance of an offensive movement in this direction, and they confirm the reports I received this morning of a considerable force of the enemy being in the vicinity of La Fayette and Dug Gap." Baird promptly forwarded this report to Thomas, recommending Negley pull back, "these reports being probable."²⁰

General Thomas himself rode forward to Negley's position in front of Dug Gap and at 2100 submitted an update to General Garfield. Thomas confirmed the heavy obstructions and strong rebel picket line at the gap and relayed information gathered from a Confederate officer prisoner. "He was not very communicative, but was generous enough to advise General Negley not to advance or he would get severely whipped. It was also reported to General Negley by citizens that a large force of the enemy were endeavoring to flank his position by moving through Catlett's Gap. Thomas went on to complain three times about his lack of cavalry and to request that Crittenden's corps move down the LaFayette road to support his operations.

On the northern flank Colonel Wilder moved along the road and railroad toward Ringgold, confirming by midnight that Ringgold was empty. Based on the information he gathered (including examining 1,000 captured letters), Wilder concluded that Bragg had not retreated toward Dalton but rather toward Rome.²¹

Meanwhile, twenty miles to the north in Chattanooga, Rosecrans and Garfield remained firmly wedded to their plan of battle and shrugged off the growing volume of reporting regarding enemy concentration in McLemore's Cove. At 2145 Rosecrans responded to the news that Thomas had not seized LaFayette. A harshly worded dispatch chided Thomas, "The general commanding directs me to say that General Negley's

dispatch forwarded by you at 10 a.m. is received. He is disappointed to learn from it that his forces move to-morrow morning instead of having moved this morning, as they should have done, this delay imperiling both extremes of the army.” Unwilling to accept the possible threat to Negley, Rosecrans continued to spur Thomas on: “Your movement on La Fayette should be made with the utmost promptness. . . . Your advance ought to have threatened La Fayette yesterday evening.”²²

The headquarters was not completely unreceptive to reporting from the front, however. At 2315 Garfield responded to Wood’s 1930 contraband report of Bragg at Gordon’s Mills and Confederate troops possibly moving toward Chattanooga.

Your dispatch of 7:30 p.m. is received. The story of the contraband is in the highest degree improbable, but in view of the fact that both in a former report of yours and in one of General Palmer’s it was stated that a force of cavalry was on the road leading from Rossville direct to La Fayette...the general commanding directs you immediately to move a brigade and battery back to Rossville, and post it in advance of the pass, so as to command the La Fayette road, and in the morning to make a reconnaissance out on the La Fayette road far enough to ascertain whether there be any force threatening our communication.²³

This dispatch reveals that Garfield was carefully tracking intelligence reporting, but it also reveals a stubborn refusal to consider information that did not correspond to Rosecrans’ estimate of the situation.

At midnight Garfield drafted the most revealing dispatch of the day, addressing it to Crittenden. Garfield acknowledged receipt of Wood’s 1930 report, and added “There have been several rumors within the last two days that General Bragg had moved out with the design to fight us between this and La Fayette. These rumors, and particularly the story of the contraband, are hardly worthy of a moment’s consideration. They should be treated with total indifference if General Thomas’ corps had reached La Fayette this

morning, as it was expected to, but in all possibility has not.” This introductory paragraph reveals the closed mindset of the command and demonstrates a stunning lack of logic. Rosecrans and Garfield were fighting the plan, not the enemy, to use modern parlance. Garfield dismissed the reports of imminent Confederate counterattack because Thomas was moving to La Fayette, failing to recognize that the reason Thomas could not move there was because the enemy was indeed concentrated between Chattanooga and LaFayette! Garfield went on to direct Crittenden to move forward to Palmer’s position and “examine carefully into the facts of the situation.” Garfield’s skepticism is revealed in the next sentence. “Should you find, as is most probable, that there are no just grounds for reasonable apprehension, you will move forward upon Ringgold early in the morning, and thence upon Dalton or La Fayette, according as you shall learn the route of the enemy’s retreat.” Garfield revealed the lack of any semblance of an accurate intelligence picture in his next instruction, “If, on the contrary, you find that there are reasonable grounds for supposing that the enemy is in strong force between you and La Fayette, and that he designs to attack you, the general commanding suggests that it will be prudent to draw your command back on Rossville.”²⁴

11 September 1863

By the morning of the eleventh Thomas’ corps was becoming the focus of effort for the Army of the Cumberland. Thomas reacted quickly to the threat to Negley. At 0325 Thomas directed Negley to halt, maintain observation of Dug Gap, be prepared to repel an enemy attack and advised him that Baird, Reynolds and Brannan were moving up to support him.²⁵

Thomas' failure to seize LaFayette threatened to disrupt Rosecrans' scheme for the campaign, and Rosecrans had made his skepticism of the reported situation clear in his communications. General Thomas quickly rose to the defense of his subordinate, reporting at 0800 he believed the enemy was threatening Negley's flanks, "I am satisfied that if the information he received was correct, his division would have suffered very severely had he attempted to march on La Fayette yesterday." He further reported his hope to take LaFayette by 12 September and yet again lamented the absence of Wilder and his mounted brigade, stating that if Wilder had been present he could have seized the critical gaps in Pigeon Mountain prior to the Confederates.²⁶ More significantly for the future of the army, Thomas also reported he was compelled to use private citizens to carry dispatches to General McCook on the right flank--a most unreliable form of communication at a critical moment in the campaign.²⁷

General Garfield's first dispatch of the day reveals the serious lack of situational awareness at Rosecrans' headquarters. At 0915 Garfield wrote to Crittenden "Reports. . . confirm the general commanding in the belief that the mass of the enemy's force has retreated on Rome, Georgia. General Thomas' advance held Dug Gap of the Pigeon Mountain with a strong picket force of the enemy in his front. All doubts as to the general direction of the retreat are now resolved." This dispatch is seriously mistaken on several counts. Based on information indicating the enemy was not retreating to Dalton Rosecrans leapt to the mistaken conclusion that the enemy must be retreating to Rome, failing to consider the third alternative that the enemy was not retreating at all. Rosecrans and Garfield did not acknowledge that Thomas did not hold Dug Gap and the enemy controlled the hill mass of Pigeon Mountain. Finally, they revealed their lack of trust in

Thomas and his subordinates by characterizing the enemy force at Pigeon Mountain as “a strong picket force.” Garfield went on to hedge his bet directing Crittenden to “Keep two objects in view, either to support General Thomas in case the enemy is in force in the vicinity of LaFayette, or to move eastward and southward toward Rome in case he has continued his retreat.” The possibility left unconsidered was that Bragg was actually in McLemore’s Cove in strength, a possibility supported by substantial reporting yet dismissed by Rosecrans and Garfield.²⁸

Despite the rapidly unfolding situation in McLemore’s Cove Rosecrans devoted considerable energy to administrative issues in his headquarters at Chattanooga the afternoon of 11 September. At 1245 he released a telegram to Colonel Townsend, Assistant Adjutant General in Washington requesting permission to raise regiments in addition to companies in liberated areas. At 1400 another telegram went out to Secretary of War Stanton requesting permission to enlist Confederate deserters.²⁹ Administrative traffic also arrived at the headquarters, as Stanton denied Rosecrans’ request for equal pay to black NCO’s in Federal service, although he stated “The Department will ask Congress to change the law and place them on equal footing of just equality.”³⁰ Stanton also approved Rosecrans’ request to raise regiments, sounding somewhat exasperated in his reply, “I have been under the impression that this authority was given to you and Governor Johnson some time ago” in reference to a 29 August telegram.³¹

As Bragg attempted to close the jaws of his trap in the cove, Washington remained ignorant of the imminent turn of events. The confidence permeating Rosecrans’ headquarters was reflected in General Halleck’s dispatches of the afternoon. Halleck wrote Rosecrans “After holding the mountain passes on the west and Dalton, or

some other point on the railroad, to prevent the return of Bragg's army, it will be decided whether your army shall move farther south into Georgia and Alabama. It is reported here by deserters that a part of Bragg's army is reinforcing Lee. It is important that the truth of this should be ascertained as early as possible."³² The collective self-delusion of the Union senior command was virtually complete at this moment. Neither Rosecrans nor Halleck saw the ongoing concentration of Confederate forces in northern Georgia or the fact that Bragg had not retreated at all. This state of mind would make the impending Confederate counterattack all the more effective.

A report from Colonel Palmer addressed to Lieutenant Colonel Goddard of Rosecrans' staff appears to have sounded the first alarms in the headquarters that the numerous reports of Bragg's intent to give battle may indeed have been true. Palmer forwarded the debriefing of a mortally wounded trooper of Forrest's command. The Confederate reported that Cheatham and Hindman's divisions had been encamped at Gordon's Mills the night prior. Equally significant the trooper reported that Forrest's cavalry had moved south from Kingston to Summerville via Ringgold, but then had turned north and marched to Gordon's Mills via LaFayette. Palmer considered the man's report highly credible given his severe wounds.³³ The reported turn of Forrest's cavalry combined with the persistent reports of large forces at Gordon's Mills and Negley's fight in the cove appear to have spurred Garfield and Rosecrans to action.

Garfield issued a radically different picture of the enemy in his 1530 dispatch to Crittenden. "Information has just been received that the enemy is in heavy force in the valley of Chickamauga Creek." Garfield continued, "Your main object will be to put yourself in such a position that you can fall back on this place in case of repulse, and at

the same time be ready, if General Thomas becomes engaged in the valley of Chattanooga Creek, to attack the enemy with the utmost vigor.”³⁴ The changed tone of this order from that of 0915 is noteworthy. For the first time Garfield was issuing orders referring to defending Chattanooga.

Another possible source of this remarkable change in attitude is an intelligence report not contained in the official record. The Summaries of the News Reaching Headquarters of General W.S. Rosecrans in the National Archives include a scout report dated 11 September.

Jno. H. Carlock Scout No. from within the enemys lines reports Braggs main force in the Chattanooga Valley moving through Mackelmores Cove to intercept our forces moving through Lookout Mountain. Their forces have been crossing at old man Gowers on Chicamauga Creek since yesterday morning early & were still crossing when I left at noon. Bragg says he intends to hem in the Yankees and whip them by Divisions. The Rebs have pickets at George Hensons about 8 miles from here on the Chattanooga Valley, on the Chattanooga & Mackelmore road.³⁵

Garfield’s reference to Chattanooga Creek in his 1530 communication to Crittenden reinforces the possibility that this particular report spurred the new appreciation of the situation as it is drawn verbatim from this report and is not mentioned in any other dispatches. Another scout report contained in the same log cites a James Lamor who had penetrated rebel lines. “Reports Bragg 29,000 strong Buckner and Forrest included. Has recd 16,000 reinforcements from Johnston under Breckenridge, total 45,000.” These reports were reinforced by a report from a railroad laborer stating Bragg had been receiving reinforcements for two weeks via the railroad with a total of two divisions having arrived.³⁶

As the day continued more reports arrived at headquarters indicating the enemy was not retreating. Colonel Palmer reported at 1715 he had engaged cavalry at Gordon’s

Mills and citizens reported there had been two divisions of Confederates encamped at that location, although the rear of their column had departed at 0100 marching toward LaFayette.³⁷

At 1845 Colonel Opdycke submitted a report that may be the origin of the oft-repeated but undocumented tale of Bragg sending deserters with disinformation into Federal lines. "A bright mulatto. . . says he has waited on Bragg since last March; deserted him last night; says Bragg was going to Rome and Atlanta with 25,000 men." The possibility of Bragg planting disinformation with an unwitting slave for Union consumption is far more likely than him sending actual soldiers into certain captivity. Captain Thoms of Rosecrans' staff penned a witty reply worth citing, "The general commanding directs that you keep the bright mulatto and keep a bright lookout for Bragg."³⁸

More serious communication soon arrived from General Wood. Wood, still bitter after the rebuff of his report of the contraband regarding enemy concentration at Gordon's Mills, wrote at 2030: "From the information gained by Colonel Harker to-day, it seems the story of the contraband was not so far from the mark as we were all disposed to believe. Colonel Harker says that not only was General Bragg here yesterday, but also Generals Polk and Hill, with a large force of infantry and cavalry." The pervasive optimism still animated Wood, as he closed "I trust we may be able to send them on their way with new impetus."³⁹

The evening orders session at Rosecrans' headquarters saw the dissemination of the new estimate of the situation to the corps commanders. At 2200 Garfield acknowledged receipt of a dispatch from General McCook on the far right which had

been issued at 0600 that morning--sixteen hours in transit. McCook had stated at that time "The enemy, I fear, has got beyond our reach unless we move forward and attack him in some position he may take up further south."⁴⁰ Garfield promptly corrected McCook's mistaken assumption regarding why he couldn't find the enemy. "Your dispatch of 6 A.M. is received. It is now nearly certain that the enemy has concentrated in heavy force in the neighborhood of LaFayette, and possibly has a considerable force westward of the northern spur of Pigeon Mountain. It is not known how strong these forces are, but the weight of evidence gives to show that the bulk of the rebel army is in that region. In view of this fact, the general commanding suggests that you close up toward General Thomas to within supporting distance, and observe well out toward LaFayette."⁴¹

The next order of the evening went to Thomas at 2215:

Information from many independent sources makes it evident that the enemy has concentrated in very considerable force in the neighborhood of La Fayette. It appears that two brigades of rebel infantry were at Gordon's Mills last evening, and one of our scouts reports that a heavy column of infantry and artillery crossed the Chattanooga at Gower's Ford yesterday, moving in the direction of your position. Crittenden has been ordered to put his corps on the road from Gordon's Mills to La Fayette near the northern spur of Pigeon Mountain with orders to attack any force that should attack you. He was to have got into position to-night. The general commanding is waiting anxiously to hear from you and to know what are the new developments of the day. In case you find the enemy concentrated in heavy force, it will be best to draw General McCook to within supporting distance. It is necessary for the general commanding to know the situation of affairs near you and General McCook before he can determine what disposition to make of General Crittenden's corps. Of course, it is our policy to attack him as soon as we know his position and force.⁴²

The final sentence makes it clear that Rosecrans still remained firmly fixed to his plan to aggressively attack Bragg wherever he may be found. It is also noteworthy that Garfield

or Rosecrans unilaterally reduced the Confederate concentration at Gordon's Mills from two divisions to two brigades.

The final orders of the night went to General Stanley and his cavalry. Stanley was also informed of the Confederate concentration at LaFayette, although the effects of fatigue and lack of situational awareness resulted in garbled instructions from Garfield. "If he (Bragg) intends to make a stand, it will be necessary for you to close up your force toward McCook, so as to cover his left flank and operate on the enemy's right." Garfield went on to prod Stanley yet again, "It is now of the utmost importance that the general commanding should be informed as soon as possible of the force and position of the enemy. Take measures to ascertain this as soon as possible."⁴³

After issuing orders for the evening the day's updates began to arrive at Rosecrans' headquarters. The location of the department headquarters at Chattanooga, far from the decisive point of the battle, was affecting Rosecrans' ability to exercise command. Thomas summarized the day at 2230, reporting Negley had been attacked ("nothing serious"), and he was moving Brannan and Reynolds up for the attack. Thomas continued, "Reports from scouts and citizens are conflicting as to the rebel force in this vicinity; most of them, however, report a large force with full complement of artillery." Thomas also forwarded a 1630 report from Negley's command stating, "He is being attacked on his right, left and front. Every indication of a superior force."⁴⁴

McCook's situational awareness on the far right flank was dangerously poor the night of 11 September. He wrote to Thomas at 2030 from the foot of Lookout Mountain near Alpine. He had attempted to open communications with Thomas at his presumed location in LaFayette during the day but had been repulsed by Confederate cavalry nine

miles from LaFayette. "A prisoner from the army and citizens report that none of your troops are there (LaFayette), but that the place is occupied by the enemy with cavalry and artillery. I can scarcely believe this, yet all the cavalry we have driven from this vicinity runs in that direction." The severe breakdown in command and control that was afflicting the Army of the Cumberland was summarized in one of McCook's closing lines, "I casually heard to-day that General Rosecrans' headquarters have been moved to Chattanooga."⁴⁵ Signal officers continued their efforts to improve communications within the army; however, they had still not established telegraph lines to General Thomas' corps, and as we have seen dispatches between the extreme flanks of the army were requiring up to sixteen hours for transmission.

Rosecrans was now aware of Bragg's concentration in the vicinity of LaFayette. He had received numerous reports of Bragg's reinforcement from Johnston and occasional reports of reinforcement from Lee. Substantial reporting indicated Bragg intended to counterattack hoping to destroy isolated elements of Rosecrans' army in the severely compartmented terrain of the mountain valleys. Despite this overwhelming body of information Rosecrans remained in Chattanooga, far from the decisive point of the battlefield. Rosecrans failed to issue peremptory orders to consolidate his widely dispersed forces. Most significantly, Rosecrans remained wedded to his offensive concept yet failed to coordinate the actions of his corps.

12 September 1863

The breakdown of communications across the army frontage continued to plague the decision makers on 12 September. At 0400 Thomas forwarded a more detailed summary of the action of 11 September to Rosecrans. "Negley and Baird were attacked

by the enemy yesterday at Davis' Crossroads. After severe fighting with an overwhelming force, as General Negley reports, were compelled to fall back to Stevens' Gap." Thomas continued, "All information goes to confirm that a large part of Bragg's army is opposed to Negley." Yet Thomas continued to think offensively, stating "If a force could be thrown in from Chattanooga in his (the enemy's) rear, it would be difficult for him to escape."⁴⁶

At 0100 Brigadier General Mitchell passed through General Negley's positions en-route to Stanley's cavalry corps. Mitchell relayed a message that Negley forwarded to Thomas, "General Rosecrans complains of a want of information in regard to your movements and position, and of the numbers and position of the enemy." Negley continued,

Feeling confident from the remarks that General Rosecrans made to General Mitchell, that he is totally uninformed as to the character of the country in this vicinity, and of the position, force and intentions of the enemy, I write you on this point that you can communicate with him at once. Also to inform you that 1 of my scouts, young Bailey, who is intelligent and reliable, has just returned from the vicinity of Bird's Mill, stating that he was informed by Mr. Payne and other citizens that in the affair of yesterday our force was confronted by Buckner's entire command, two other divisions of infantry from the vicinity of Dug Gap, and about 5,000 or 6,000 cavalry; that the enemy expected to hold us at Dug Gap while Buckner and the cavalry could pass to our rear and take possession of Stevens' and Cooper's Gaps; that Breckenridge's command was on Pigeon Ridge or at La Fayette; that Bragg was concentrating his entire army at or near Le Fayette; that the rebel cavalry west of Pigeon Ridge had passed through Worthington Gap and the infantry had fallen back to the top of the ridge and beyond. The smoke from their line of encampments was visible this evening. A similar statement was made by two other citizens on hearsay.⁴⁷

At 0700 General Thomas promptly forwarded this report to Rosecrans along with a proposal for a coordinated advance on LaFayette. The problem with Thomas' proposal

was that he also envisioned the Federal corps converging on LaFayette, while the enemy force was actually located west of Pigeon Mountain to his direct front.⁴⁸

Thomas recognized his lack of critical information and at 0630 reiterated his plea to Garfield for cavalry. "As I am now situated it is impossible to know the strength or position of the enemy. This information I desire, and which is all important, is beyond my reach for want of cavalry."⁴⁹

Garfield reiterated the report of enemy forces in LaFayette to General McCook at 1030, adding that Thomas had been unable to advance further than the opening of Dug Gap. McCook was finally given direct orders to close on Thomas with two divisions, "It is of the most vital importance that you get within supporting distance of General Thomas at the earliest moment."⁵⁰ The vast frontage of the army and the poor communications would prevent McCook from receiving this information until yet another day of attempting to reach Thomas at his supposed position in LaFayette had passed.

Garfield quickly replied to Thomas' updates at 1115, yet Rosecrans still remained skeptical of the situation. "Your dispatches of 10:30 last night and of 4 this morning have been received. After maturely weighing the notes the general commanding is induced to think General Negley withdrew more from prudence than compulsion." Garfield continued to relay the virtual abdication of army command to Thomas, citing Rosecrans "dispatched you last night to communicate with General McCook and call him up if you thought necessary. He trusts this has been done; if not, no time should be lost." Despite his crumbling situational awareness and the increasing indications of impending battle Rosecrans remained fixed in Chattanooga. Garfield continued, "It is very important at this time for you to communicate promptly, that the general commanding

may know how to manage General Crittenden's corps, which will attack the enemy as soon as it can be gotten in position. When a battle does begin, it is desirable that every command should do its best and push hard, using the bayonet whenever possible."⁵¹

Rosecrans submitted an update to Halleck stating succinctly "The enemy has concentrated at La Fayette, and has attacked one of Thomas' columns in the Chickamauga Valley, west of Dug Gap, compelling it to fall back to Stevens' Gap." Rosecrans also reiterated his request for support from Burnside to screen his vulnerable left flank, stating, "I trust I am sufficient for the enemy now in my front."⁵²

The confident tone of Rosecrans communications with Washington was not reflected in his communications with his reserve corps. At 1145 Garfield wrote to General Granger, "We are concentrating the army to support General Thomas and fight a general battle. . . . If all reports are true, we have not a moment to lose."⁵³ Unfortunately communications to other corps commanders lacked this clarity.

Crittenden's dispatches of the afternoon reveal a serious lack of understanding of the enemy situation. At 1045 Crittenden reported, "Citizens state the enemy have left for Rome." At 1300 Crittenden wrote "In my opinion the enemy have already fled beyond my reach. My only hope, or rather my great hope, is that General Thomas or General McCook may be able to hit them a side lick." At 1400 he wrote "Should General Thomas be in the vicinity of LaFayette, as stated in your orders of yesterday morning, I think that between him and Colonel Wilder, all the enemy north of LaFayette will be effectively bagged." The reality of the situation began to dawn on Crittenden after sharp clashes with Confederate cavalry near Gordon's Mill in the afternoon. "The audacity of the rebel cavalry surprises me, and I can hardly realize that Generals Thomas and

McCook are in the positions supposed, or at the least that the former is not at or near LaFayette.”⁵⁴

The truth must have hit Crittenden hard. At 1845 Garfield wrote, “Your confidence in Wilder’s security seems to be based in part on the supposition that General Thomas has a force in the vicinity of LaFayette. This is incorrect; he has never been nearer than the western slope of Pigeon Mountain. . . the general commanding directs you to draw him back at once, and place him on your front and left flank. . . . Take up a defensible position and explore the roads with a view to moving up the Dry Valley route towards General Thomas.”⁵⁵

Crittenden’s confusion is all the more troubling when one considers the reports submitted by his own subordinate, General Wood directly to Garfield from Gordon’s Mills. At 0600 Wood reported, “The owner of this establishment says it was a common talk among the soldiers that a stand was to be made at La Fayette to check us for a time; the grand stand to be made at Rome. . . . The enemy’s drums were heard this morning, apparently 2 miles in advance, showing the presence of infantry as well as cavalry.” By 1500 Wood was reporting one of his scouts had gathered information of Southern intent to launch a spoiling attack against one element of the advancing Federal army in the LaFayette area. At 1930 Wood submitted a detailed deserter debriefing confirming the previous contraband report of heavy concentrations at Gordon’s Mills. Most significantly the deserter reported that Governor Harris had addressed the troops, telling them that the Federal army was widely separated, the Confederate forces “had four corps; that they outnumbered us two to one, and that they would fall on and destroy two of our corps before the other corps could come up.” The deserter continued, “it is commonly reported

that Bragg's army is from 60,000 to 70,000 strong, but they do not think it so much, and that the strength is exaggerated to encourage the men."⁵⁶

As late as 2145 Crittenden refused to acknowledge the growing evidence of enemy concentration to his immediate front. A Confederate prisoner had reported Buckner's corps between Leet's Tanyard and LaFayette. Crittenden continued "It has always been the plan of the enemy to make stubborn defense on a retreat, and I do not yet believe that there is a strong force of infantry in the vicinity of La Fayette." Crittenden's doubts should have been erased when he received Garfield's 2130 response to Crittenden's 1645 report regarding the "audacity of the rebel cavalry." Garfield wrote "Your dispatch of 4:45 p.m. is just received. The general commanding directs me to say that there is no longer doubt that the enemy is in heavy force in the neighborhood of LaFayette, and there is far more probability of his attacking you than that he is running. Get your command well in hand and be ready for defense or advance, as may be necessary."⁵⁷

Confusion reigned on the right flank of the army as well. At 0730 General McCook forwarded an 11 September report from Colonel McCook of the cavalry corps to General Thomas indicating no enemy forces had passed down the road to Rome. Thomas forwarded this report to Rosecrans at 1300. Allowing for several hours in transit to Chattanooga this critical report required almost twenty-four hours to reach the headquarters. At 1645 McCook summarized his operations for the day, reporting "all our cavalry was concentrated this morning and sent under General Crook upon the direct La Fayette road. . . with orders to drive back the rebel cavalry, and to drive in the infantry pickets, if they are there; and if they are not there, they are to communicate with General

Thomas.” McCook was completely unaware of the enemy concentration at LaFayette, continuing “In case the rebel army has retreated to Resaca, I will move to Summerville; that point is the key to this valley.” Had McCook been aware of the current estimate of the enemy situation the next element of information would have been critical. “There is great commotion at La Fayette to-day, judging from the clouds of dust arising, the heavy columns of dust appearing to extend from La Fayette north.” McCook’s complete lack of situational awareness is summarized in his closing line, “I think Crook with find La Fayette abandoned by their infantry; in my judgment Resaca is their point.”⁵⁸

Despite Garfield’s claim in his orders to Granger that the commander was consolidating the army for battle, there were no additional orders issued during the usual evening orders session at the headquarters on 12 September. Rosecrans did reach the decision to transfer his headquarters to General Thomas’ location and preparations for that move probably dominated discussion that evening. The move to a central location was probably two days late based on Rosecrans’ and Garfield’s own estimates of the situation. One probable explanation for this delay is the fact the telegraph line was still not operational to Thomas’ location. Despite ongoing efforts of the signal officers they did not anticipate completion until 14 September.⁵⁹ Rosecrans’ decision to shift his headquarters to Chattanooga, site of better communications with Washington but significantly farther from his maneuver elements, continued to plague the army.

13 September 1863

The thirteenth began with General Thomas submitting an astute observation regarding the nature of the battlefield along Chickamauga Creek. The enemy, by virtue of control of Pigeon Mountain, could observe Federal movements while masked by the

ridge. "The long line of dust seen rising from behind this mountain indicates the movement of a large body of troops. . . a forward movement, unless made with our whole force, would be attended with great danger to our troops."⁶⁰

Prior to setting out to join General Thomas at 1300, General Rosecrans sent a telegram to General Burnside which reveals his estimate of the enemy situation at that time. "Have deferred writing until I could ascertain something of the intentions more reliable than the rumor that he had gone to Rome. He never retreated farther than La Fayette, and it appears he is concentrating his forces in vicinity of that point and massing all his cavalry. Every indication now is that he feels able to give us battle." Rosecrans went on to appeal for assistance on his flank, as had done since the opening of his campaign. Rosecrans clearly understood the strategic situation as he departed Chattanooga, although he remained uncertain of Bragg's intent, despite substantial reporting.⁶¹

Immediately prior to Rosecrans' departure from Chattanooga Lieutenant Colonel Goddard drafted orders to General Crittenden ordering him to assume defensive positions along the western bank of the Chickamauga Creek. Rosecrans "will close General McCook down on Thomas and both on you as soon as possible, so as to concentrate the weight of our army against the enemy." Goddard went on to warn Crittenden, "The evidence accumulates that the whole of Bragg's army is not only in the valley, but even over in McLemore's Cove, near the foot of Lookout. Hence the necessity of great caution."⁶²

As Rosecrans rode forward along the top of Lookout Mountain further details arrived from the front. Negley reported Buckner's corps with two divisions of eight

brigades and Hill's corps with three divisions present in the valley based on a deserter report.⁶³ McCook commenced his frustrating march to join Thomas, initially marching toward Dougherty's Gap, then turning back to descend into Lookout Valley based on a misunderstood instruction from General Thomas to join him at Stevens' Gap. McCook's frustration is palpable in a dispatch of 0830 that morning. Responding to a charge from General Garfield that he had failed to maintain communications McCook stated "The headquarters of the department were moved away from Stevenson to Trenton without my knowledge. They were moved from Trenton to Chattanooga without my knowledge." Little did McCook know that the headquarters were now underway to Cooper's Gap without his knowledge! McCook did relay a report from General Crook's cavalry that "the enemy have evacuated La Fayette with their infantry. There were immense clouds of dust seen in the direction of La Fayette yesterday." These were the same clouds Thomas had seen. The enemy was moving out of La Fayette, not to evacuate the town but rather to attack the Federal army.⁶⁴

At 1130 McCook forwarded an alarming deserter debriefing to Garfield. The source was a veteran of Shiloh and "states that he has never seen so large an army together as the one now concentrated at La Fayette. The following generals he knows to be there: Joe Johnston, Bragg, Polk, D. H. Hill, Forrest, Wharton, Harrison, Pegram, Scott, Breckenridge, Preston, Hodge and Wheeler. He also states that he is morally certain that reenforcements are coming from Virginia by way of Atlanta."⁶⁵

Meanwhile back in Washington General Halleck finally began to take notice of the situation. He signaled General Grant or Sherman (Grant was known to be ill at the time) to send all available forces "to Memphis, thence to Corinth and Tuscumbia, to co-

operate with Rosecrans” should Johnston and Bragg attempt to turn Rosecrans’ right flank. This telegram would mysteriously go astray and not arrive in Memphis until 22 September. The evening of 13 September General Foster telegraphed Halleck from Fort Monroe that “trains of cars had been heard running all the time, day and night, for the last thirty-six hours, on the Petersburg and Richmond road, evidently indicating a movement of troops in some direction.” Lacking confirmation of any movement from General Meade, Halleck waited another day before concluding there was any movement to reinforce Bragg.⁶⁶

Rosecrans arrived at Cooper’s Gap at 2230 to assume effective command of his army as the Southern host marched to attack him. Young Captain J. C. Van Duzer of the signal corps had a clear grasp of the situation the night of 13 September. He telegraphed Colonel A. Stager in Washington from department headquarters in Chattanooga, “The enemy are between Thomas and McCook on the south and Crittenden and Granger on the north, and day before yesterday gave Negley a thrashing. To-day Crittenden has been engaged. Rosecrans went down this p.m. and by day after to-morrow or Wednesday you may look to hear of Bragg getting hurt. We are in a ticklish place here, but hope to come out with whole skin. Can do nothing but wait.”⁶⁷

14 September 1863

Events of 14 September demonstrate conclusively the lack of a disciplined approach to intelligence analysis in the Army of the Cumberland. Crook’s report of the enemy evacuating LaFayette combined with a general quiet in McLemore’s Cove led Rosecrans to conclude the enemy had withdrawn from the valley, despite extensive reporting indicating Bragg was gathering a huge force for a counter stroke. At 1130

Garfield wrote to McCook "The enemy appear to have left the valley between Lookout and Pigeon Mountains and the weight of evidence goes to show that he has evacuated La Fayette." Garfield went on to order McCook to double back yet again and march to Thomas via Dougherty's Gap; an instruction McCook successfully appealed but at the cost of approximately six hours delay.

Crittenden conducted reconnaissance out to a distance of five miles and reported "I am confident there is no considerable force of infantry near me at this time." Crittenden was also informed by Garfield of the apparent Confederate abandonment of the valley and LaFayette, and directed to move his corps off Missionary Ridge closer to Chickamauga Creek and water supplies.⁶⁸

As the Army of the Cumberland paused along the Chickamauga and McCook struggled to close on Thomas, Halleck received confirmation from General Meade that General Lee had detached some element of his army. Meade wrote, "My judgment, formed of the variety of meager and conflicting testimony, is, that Lee's army has been reduced by Longstreet's corps, and perhaps some regiments from Ewell's and Hill's."⁶⁹ Despite this alarming news Halleck still did not notify Rosecrans of the possible movement of Longstreet's corps. Rather he notified General Foster at Fort Monroe (prudent in view of Longstreet's operations the previous spring in the Suffolk area), and Generals Hurlburt and Burnside. Cryptically telegraphing Hurlburt in Memphis "There are reasons why you should reenforce General Rosecrans with all possible dispatch. It is believed the enemy will concentrate to give him battle. You must be there to help him."⁷⁰

15 September 1863

There was little information of value obtained by the Army of the Cumberland on the fifteenth. Reconnaissance continued across the frontage, with little intelligence gained. General Negley did report an “immense cloud of dust” in the direction of LaFayette beyond Pigeon Mountain, a smaller dust cloud near Bluebird Gap and another immense cloud, this one moving quickly, north of the Mountain. Numerous enemy wagons and guns were observed near Dug Gap. Negley also reported a “great many fires” on the Chattanooga road north of Pigeon Ridge.⁷¹ General McCook arrived at Stevens’ Gap late in the day with his troops expected to follow on 16 September.⁷²

General Rosecrans’ headquarters displaced forward to Crawfish Springs, arriving late in the day. The most significant report of the day arrived at Rosecrans’ headquarters some time that night. General Halleck had finally notified Rosecrans of the approach of Longstreet’s corps at 1630 on 15 September. “From information received here to-day it is very probable that three divisions of Lee’s army have been sent to re-enforce Bragg.” Halleck went on to inform Rosecrans he was sending all available forces from the Departments of the Ohio and Cumberland as well as reenforcements from Hurlburt and Sherman.⁷³ The phrasing of Halleck’s telegram indicates he considered a telegram from Abram Wakeman in New York the definitive warning of Lee’s move. Wakeman’s telegram was received in Washington at 1415 and stated, “A reliable person, who left Atlanta, Ga., on the 4th instant, states that he passed on his way from Atlanta to Richmond three divisions of Lee’s army on its way to re-enforce Bragg at or near Dalton, Ga., and that the general report was that the rebel forces were to be concentrated at or near there, for the purpose of overthrowing Rosecrans’ army.”⁷⁴

16 September 1863

On the eve of the Battle of Chickamauga the widely separated elements of the Army of the Cumberland finally reunited and prepared for their greatest challenge. Now fully aware of Bragg's intent and sensing the specific threat to his left flank and Chattanooga beyond, Rosecrans busied himself preparing for the impending fight. His telegram to General Halleck of 2025 that evening is noteworthy for its calm tone and shows Rosecrans at his best, on the eve of a great battle facing long odds. "From information derived from various sources from my front, I have reason to believe what you assert in your dispatch of 4.30 p.m. of yesterday is true, and that they have arrived at Atlanta at last. Push Burnside down."⁷⁵

Finale--17-20 September

Rosecrans and his army prepared to receive the Southern host. The corps commanders were directed to post "officers of intelligence on all available high points in your vicinity from day to day, to watch the valley and surrounding country closely...and forward the result to department headquarters daily."⁷⁶ The observers yielded little more than widespread reports of smoke, dust and heavy Confederate movement in the course of the day. At least within Thomas' corps it was perceived the enemy was massing against the Federal left as early at 0340 on 17 September, however the situation remained murky throughout the day.⁷⁷

September 18 brought the sharp fights at Alexander's and Reed's Bridges and confirmed the expectation the rebels would press the Union left. Rosecrans resolved to leapfrog Thomas' corps to the left of Crittenden's corps and the movement was conducted with some difficulty in the course of the night.⁷⁸ The decisive days of the

Battle of Chickamauga was 19 and 20 September. After a day and a half of general fighting Longstreet's massed column shattered the Union right at midday on 20 September and the resulting route of the Army of the Cumberland cost William S. Rosecrans his hard-earned reputation along with some 16,179 Federal casualties.⁷⁹ Despite Rosecrans' success in turning Bragg and seizing Chattanooga the Chickamauga campaign would go down in history as a defeat. The campaign stands as a stark warning to military professionals of the hazards of over-confidence and mistaken assumptions.

¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 482.

²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 481.

³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 483.

⁴OR Vol. 30, Part III, 488.

⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 489.

⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 482.

⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part IV, 610-611.

⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 493.

⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 480.

¹⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 479.

¹¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 484.

¹²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 486.

¹³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 507.

¹⁴Summaries of the News Reaching Headquarters of General W.S. Rosecrans, 1863-64, RG 393, part 1, entry 986, National Archives, Washington, D.C., Sept 9 Entry.

¹⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 507-508.

¹⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 516.

¹⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 517-518.

¹⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 513-514.

¹⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 515.

²⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 509-510.

²¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 512-513.

²²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 511.

²³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 514.

²⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 517.

²⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 534.

²⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 534.

²⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 538.

²⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 544-545.

²⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 529.

³⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 528.

³¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 528.

³²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 530.

³³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 532.

³⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 545-46

³⁵ Summaries of the News Reaching Headquarters of General W.S. Rosecrans, 1863-64, RG 393, part 1, entry 986, National Archives, Washington, D.C., Sept 11 Entry.

³⁶ Summaries of the News Reaching Headquarters of General W.S. Rosecrans, 1863-64, RG 393, part 1, entry 986, National Archives, Washington, D.C., Sept 11 Entry.

- ³⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 532.
- ³⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 549.
- ³⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 547-548.
- ⁴⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 540.
- ⁴¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 541.
- ⁴²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 539-40.
- ⁴³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 551.
- ⁴⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 535 (Thomas) and 536 (Negley).
- ⁴⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 539.
- ⁴⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 564.
- ⁴⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 567.
- ⁴⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 568.
- ⁴⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 564.
- ⁵⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 570.
- ⁵¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 564.
- ⁵²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 561.
- ⁵³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 586.
- ⁵⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 574-576.
- ⁵⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 577.
- ⁵⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 581.
- ⁵⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 577.
- ⁵⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 570-71.

⁵⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 597.

⁶⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 597

⁶¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 617-618.

⁶²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 607.

⁶³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 601.

⁶⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 598 (Crook's Report), 603 (Headquarters Displacement).

⁶⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 603-4.

⁶⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part I, 35.

⁶⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 596.

⁶⁸OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 632.

⁶⁹OR, Vol. 30, Part I, 35.

⁷⁰OR, Vol. 30, Part I, 36.

⁷¹OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 646.

⁷²OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 647.

⁷³OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 644.

⁷⁴OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 643.

⁷⁵OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 666.

⁷⁶OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 702.

⁷⁷OR, Vol. 30, Part III, 703.

⁷⁸Peter Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound* (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1992)
114-118.

⁷⁹Cozzens, 534.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

The following will be a critical analysis of General Rosecrans' intelligence operations during the campaign for Chattanooga. The purpose is to identify specific errors committed in the conduct of the campaign which are of a timeless nature and relevant to modern combat operations. As is frequently the case, the Chickamauga Campaign is considerably more complicated than presented in many histories. The errors contributing to the Union defeat are occasionally subtle and were generally committed for reasons that appeared sound at the time, in their historical informational context.

Acknowledging the imperfect art of historical analysis, and attempting to always consider our subject in context, there are five major mistakes that provide ample material for the modern student of military intelligence. Analysis of these five problems provides an answer to the primary thesis research question, Why did General Rosecrans fail to accurately estimate General Bragg's course of action during the Chickamauga Campaign?

The first and most significant failure of General Rosecrans was organizational and symptomatic of his time. There was no officer or office specifically detailed to conduct an impartial and independent analysis of the information and intelligence gathered by the army's many sources. The record repeatedly demonstrates the failure of Rosecrans and Garfield to acknowledge the changing reality of their situation despite considerable reporting indicating Bragg's actual intent. The difficulty these officers faced is discussed at length in Norman Dixon's *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*. Initially identified by L. Festinger in his *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* in 1957, Dissonance

Theory may be summarized as follows; "Once the decision has been made and the person is committed to a given course of action, the psychological situation changes decisively. There is less emphasis on objectivity and there is more partiality and bias in the way in which the person views and evaluates the alternatives."¹ The modern staff with its dedicated intelligence officer focusing on an objective evaluation of the enemy is a direct result of this systemic weakness. The timeless lesson is relevant even within our improved modern staff structure; the intelligence officer must be aware of this potential pitfall and guard at all times against unintentional bias intended to reinforce the decisions of the commander.

The second major mistake of General Rosecrans was the absence of a plan for gathering information to support his decisions during the campaign. Rosecrans formulated his campaign plan, a sound and even brilliant concept of the operation, based on his prior experience and knowledge of General Bragg. As we have seen, the Army of the Cumberland conducted aggressive intelligence gathering operations across their full frontage, however there was a lack of direction and focus to the effort. Some commanders (Sheridan and Wilder) performed extraordinarily well, aggressively seeking information and providing timely updates to the commander, however the efforts were uneven across the army. The sheer volume of reporting from these masters of the art accorded them a higher credibility and level of attention from the commander to the detriment of sectors of the front that deserved greater emphasis. The failure to plan for intelligence collection operations throughout the campaign resulted in the complete absence of cavalry from the critical point of the battlefield in front of Thomas' corps during the end game of the pursuit of Bragg. Despite continual pleas from Thomas this

error was never rectified. Even cursory consideration of intelligence collection operations would have resulted in improved planning for courier lines to speed information flow between the widely dispersed flanks and would have resulted in increased cavalry dedicated to reconnaissance tasks versus the deep turning movement assigned to Stanley's cavalry corps.

Rosecrans' third error was placing himself in Chattanooga during the critical phase of the campaign. As we have seen, Rosecrans' movement to Chattanooga effectively abdicated command of three quarters of the army to General Thomas, retaining direct control of only Crittenden's corps. Time-distance factors resulted in Rosecrans and Garfield falling irretrievably behind in the race to gather information and make informed decisions. Rosecrans' reasons for this move were not inconsiderable. Political concerns dictated his headquarters physically enter Chattanooga, "the objective point of the campaign," and the continual barrage of communication from Washington no doubt clouded his judgment. These reasons cannot justify the error of placing himself so far from the critical point of the battlefield, both physical and informational, in the center of the converging army.

Rosecrans' fourth error was militarily inexcusable even in the context of the time. He ordered a general pursuit of an enemy he knew to have been heavily reinforced and failed to gain and maintain contact with the enemy. Rosecrans allowed his corps to become widely separated and unable to support one another despite extensive intelligence reporting indicating Bragg intended to give battle rather than cede the "key to the Confederacy" without a fight. The only plausible explanation for this failure of generalship is that Rosecrans was so stung by the lack of acclaim following his masterful

Tullahoma campaign that he was determined to compel Bragg to fight by aggressive pursuit, regardless of the risk. The implications of this explanation are the most chilling of this discussion; Rosecrans and Garfield placed the quest for glory above sound military fundamentals and in so doing risked decisive defeat.

Rosecrans' fifth error encompasses the previous four and was fundamental to the resulting defeat. Rosecrans and his generals planned against an assumed enemy course of action or "template" in modern parlance and failed to maintain open minds regarding their foe. There is a current saying among military planners, "The enemy gets a vote!" Rosecrans and his generals assumed Bragg would run when turned and collectively turned a blind eye to evidence to the contrary. The overconfidence, even arrogance of the senior leaders of the Army of the Cumberland echoes down through the years in their official dispatches. Even when evidence accumulated that Bragg had halted and was prepared to give battle before La Fayette subordinate commanders appended caveats to their reports reiterating their overwhelming confidence of their ability to whip the rebels. This example of the hazards of overconfidence, arrogance and groupthink is perhaps the central lesson to be learned from the sacrifice of the brave soldiers of the Army of the Cumberland.

Notably missing from the above lessons learned is any reference to the stunning use of interior lines by the Confederacy in shifting Longstreet's corps west to face Rosecrans. Among the popular myths challenged by this thesis is the belief that Longstreet's presence was critical to the campaign. The record shows that Rosecrans was well aware of extensive reinforcement of Bragg by Johnston and the persistent rumor of reinforcement from the Army of Northern Virginia predated official notification of the

move by many days. When official notification of Longstreet's departure arrived from Halleck on the 16th of September it merely confirmed Rosecrans' expectation. Earlier notification would probably not have changed Rosecrans' conduct of the campaign. There is little doubt the presence of Longstreet and his forces contributed mightily to the course of the tactical battle. However, at the operational level Bragg's best chances for victory passed well prior to Longstreet's arrival when he failed to decisively defeat Thomas' isolated corps in McLemore's Cove on 11 and 12 September.

In conclusion, Rosecrans was not misled by an aggressive Confederate disinformation campaign. The *evidence* does not support the assertion that fatigue was a major factor in Rosecrans' operational level decision making. The evidence also demonstrates that while Longstreet and his corps were significant at the tactical level, Rosecrans' operational level decisions were made with the expectation Bragg would receive reinforcement from Lee. Rosecrans failed to accurately estimate Bragg's course of action due to five fundamental errors; failure to centrally plan reconnaissance and intelligence operations, failure to conduct disciplined and objective analysis of available intelligence, failure to place himself at the decisive point on the battlefield, conduct of a general pursuit against a reinforced foe without maintaining contact, and over-arching all these elements a fundamental refusal to reconsider the basic assumption of the enemy's course of action when faced with contrary evidence.

The lessons of this defeat ring clearly down through the years and remain stunningly relevant to the modern commander and his intelligence officer. Each of the five errors identified have the potential to derail the most carefully drafted plans of the modern commander. Reconnaissance operations must be centrally directed and focused

on confirming the current estimate of the situation or developing the enemy's actual intent. Analysis of information must be conducted in an objective manner, free of preconceptions that lead us to only seek confirmation and dismiss inconsistent reports. The commander and his staff must place themselves in the location from which they can best direct the battle and maintain situational awareness. Intelligence professionals must focus intelligence in time and space on the critical decisionmaker to enable his success. General pursuit, with the attendant loss of control and vulnerability to enemy counterattack, remains a high-risk operation and should not be undertaken unless contact or observation is maintained with the enemy force. Finally, and most importantly, the greatest asset a commander can bring to battle is an open mind and humility. Respect for one's foes and their capabilities, quiet confidence in place of arrogance, will enable the future commander and his staff to achieve decisive victory while avoiding the crippling blows of sudden reversal at the hands of a "defeated" opponent.

¹L. Festinger, *Conflict, Decision and Dissonance* (London: Tavistock, 1964), 155.

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